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MRS. DOT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

(*Uniform with this Volume*)

PLAYS:

A MAN OF HONOUR
LADY FREDERICK
JACK STRAW
THE EXPLORER
PENELOPE

(*In Preparation*)
SMITH
THE TENTH MAN
GRACE
LOAVES AND FISHES

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MRS. DOT

A FARCE

In Three Acts

By W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMXII

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This play, originally called *Worthley's Entire*, was produced at the Comedy Theatre on April 26, 1908, with the following cast :

James Blenkinsop	Fred Kerr
Gerald Halstane	W. Graham Browne
Freddie Perkins	Kenneth Douglas
Charles	Herbert Ross
Mr. Rixon	George Bellamy
Mason	Horton Cooper
Mr. Wright	Brian Egerton
George	H. Gerrish
Lady Sellenger	Marie Illington
Nellie Sellenger	Lydia Billbrooke
Miss Eliza MacGregor	Lena Halliday
Mrs. Worthley	Marie Tempest

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MRS. 'DOT

CHARACTERS

MRS. WORTHLEY

FREDDIE PERKINS, *her nephew and secretary*

MISS ELIZA MACGREGOR, *her aunt*

GERALD HALSTANE

JAMES BLENKINSOP

LADY SELLENGER

NELLIE, *her daughter*

CHARLES, *Gerald's servant*

MASON, *Mrs. Worthley's Butler*

MR. WRIGHT, *a tailor*

MR. RIXON, *Gerald's solicitor*

BLENKINSOP'S MAN

TIME: *The present day*

ACT I—*Gerald's rooms in Grafton Street*

ACTS II and III—*Mrs. Worthley's house on the river*

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MRS. DOT

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: GERALD'S *rooms in Grafton Street. A man's room, pleasantly furnished, with very comfortable arm-chairs, and prints on the walls. Books are lying about, and smoking utensils.*

CHARLES, GERALD HALSTANE'S *servant, opens the door.* MR. WRIGHT *comes in, a dapper young man, smartly dressed.*

CHARLES.

There, you can see for yourself that Mr. Halstane is not at home.

MR. WRIGHT.

Very well, I'll wait for him.

CHARLES.

You'll have to wait till midnight, because I don't expect him in.

MR. WRIGHT.

Last time I came you said he'd be back in half an

hour, and when I returned you said he'd just gone out. You don't catch me napping a second time.

CHARLES.

The governor don't take impertinence lying down, Mr. Wright, and he'll look upon it as a great liberty your dunning him in this way.

MR. WRIGHT.

I don't know about taking impertinence, but he'll have to take a summons if my account is not settled at once. [*There is a ring at the bell.*

CHARLES.

[*Ironically.*] Make yourself quite at home, won't you?

MR. WRIGHT.

Thank you. I will.

[CHARLES *goes out and leaves the door open so that the conversation with* RIXON, *the solicitor, is heard.*

RIXON.

[*Outside.*] Is Mr. Halstane in?

CHARLES.

No, sir. He's gone to his club.

RIXON.

Well, I'll ring him up. I must see him on a matter of the very greatest importance You're on the telephone, aren't you?

CHARLES.

Yes, sir. But there's a person waiting to see him.

RIXON.

[*Coming in.*] Oh, never mind.

[RIXON *is a short, rubicund man, with white whiskers and a hearty manner.*

MR. WRIGHT.

[*Going towards him.*] Mr. Rixon. [RIXON *looks at him without recognising him.*] Don't you remember me, sir? I'm the junior partner in Andrews and Wright.

RIXON.

Of course I do. I saw your father on business the other day. [*To* CHARLES.] Where's the telephone book?

CHARLES.

I'll just go and fetch it, sir. Mr. Halstane lent it to the gentleman upstairs.

RIXON.

Be as quick as you can. [CHARLES *goes out.*

RIXON.

[*To* MR. WRIGHT.] What are you doing here?

MR. WRIGHT.

Well, the fact is, we've got a very large account with Halstane, and I'm told he's in queer street. I want to get the money before the crash comes.

RIXON.

Queer street? The man's just come into seven thousand a year.

MR. WRIGHT.

What!

RIXON.

That's why I'm running all over the place to find him. You know he's a relation of the Hollingtors. I was at her ladyship's not half an hour ago—the Dowager, you know—my firm has acted for the whole family for the last hundred years. Well, I'd hardly arrived before a message came from the War Office to say that her grandson, the present lord, had been killed in India. So as soon as I could, I bolted round here. Mr. Halstane is the next heir, and he comes into seven thousand a year and the title.

MR. WRIGHT.

My gracious, that's a piece of luck.

RIXON.

I don't mind telling you now that he'd pretty well come to the end of his tether. Your money was all right because he'd have paid everything up, but he wouldn't have had much left.

MR. WRIGHT.

Of course he doesn't know anything about this yet?

RIXON.

Not a word. For all he knows, he's a ruined man, and here am I trying to get him on the telephone to

tell him he's come into a peerage and a very handsome income.

[CHARLES *enters with the telephone book.*

CHARLES.

7869 Gerrard, sir.

RIXON.

Thanks.

[*He rings up and asks for the number.*

RIXON.

7869 Gerrard, please, Miss. . . . What? Confound it, the line's engaged. . . . I must go round to his club in a cab. I suppose you don't want to wait here now, Wright?

MR. WRIGHT.

No, sir. I'll get back to the shop.

CHARLES.

I 'ope you'll suit your own convenience, sir. [CHARLES *shows them out and comes back.*] I don't know what these tradespeople are coming to when they expect gentlemen to pay their bills.

[*He seats himself in the most comfortable chair in the room and puts his feet on the table. His back is to the door. The newspaper is lying by his side. He shuts his eyes and dozes.*

[GERALD *enters silently, followed immediately by* BLENKINSOP *and* FREDDIE PERKINS.

[GERALD *is a handsome man of seven or eight and twenty, simple in his manners, care-*

fully dressed but without exaggeration. FREDDIE *is a vivacious boy of two and twenty,* BLENKINSOP *is an old bachelor of five and forty; he is well-preserved and takes a good deal of care of his appearance. He is dressed in the height of fashion.*

[*For a moment they look silently at* CHARLES, *who wakes with a start and jumps up in confusion.*

CHARLES.

I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't hear you come in.

GERALD.

[*With an ironical politeness which he preserves during all his remarks to* CHARLES.] Pray don't let us disturb you. I shall never forgive myself if I think I've interrupted your nap.

CHARLES.

Shall I take your hat, sir?

GERALD.

It's very kind of you. I shouldn't like you to put yourself out.

FREDDIE.

[*Sitting down.*] By Jove, what a ripping chair! No wonder that Charles went to sleep.

CHARLES.

Mr. Rixon has just been, sir. He's gone on to the club.

GERALD.

[*With a laugh.*] I'm not sorry to miss him. One's solicitor seldom has any good news to bring one.

CHARLES.

Will you have the whiskey and soda, sir?

GERALD.

If it wouldn't give you too much trouble.

[CHARLES *goes out, and* GERALD *hands the cigarette box to* BLENKINSOP *and* FREDDIE.

GERALD.

Sit down and make yourself comfortable, James.

BLENKINSOP.

To do that is one of the few principles I've adhered to in the course of an easy and unadventurous life.

[CHARLES *enters with a tray on which are glasses, whiskey and sodas.*

CHARLES.

Is there anything else you want, sir?

GERALD.

If you can spare me two minutes of your valuable time, I should like to make a few observations to you.

FREDDIE.

Collect yourself, Charles, to receive the words of wisdom that fall from Mr. Halstane's lips.

CHARLES.

Things is very bad on the Stock Exchange, sir.

GERALD.

Charles, I have no objection to your sitting in my arm-chair and putting your feet on my table. I am willing to ignore the fact that you smoke my cigars and drink my whiskey.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Sipping.*] You show excellent judgment, Charles. The whiskey's capital.

CHARLES.

[*Imperturbably.*] Pot-still, sir. Fifteen years in bottle.

GERALD.

I can even bear with equanimity that you should read my letters. For the most part they're excessively tedious, and they will only show you how deplorable is the education of the upper classes. But I must insist on your *not* reading my paper till I've done with it.

CHARLES.

I'm very sorry, sir. I thought there was no objection.

GERALD.

A newspaper, a suit of clothes, and a bottle of wine are three things at which I prefer . . .

CHARLES.

To 'ave the first cut in, sir.

GERALD.

I thank you, Charles; I couldn't have expressed my meaning more idiomatically.

FREDDIE.

[*Laughing.*] You'd better have a drink.

CHARLES.

Allow me, sir. [*He mixes a whiskey and soda.*

GERALD.

You need not pour out the whiskey with such a generous hand as when you help yourself. Thank you.

CHARLES.

Them mining shares of yours is very low, sir.

GERALD.

They are.

CHARLES.

If you'll remember, sir, I was all against them at the time you bought.

BLENKINSOP.

You are a jewel, Charles, if besides administering to your master's wants you advise him in his financial transactions.

GERALD.

Unless I'm mistaken, Charles strongly recommended me to invest my money in public-houses.

CHARLES.

Them being frequented in peace and war, and not subject to clandestine removals. In peace men drink to celebrate their 'appiness, and in war to drown their sorrow.

GERALD.

[*Smiling.*] You are a philosopher, Charles, and it cuts me to the quick that I should be forced to deny myself the charm of your conversation.

CHARLES.

[*Astonished.*] I beg your pardon, sir?

GERALD.

I am endeavouring to give you notice in such a manner as not to outrage your susceptibilities.

CHARLES.

Me, sir? I'm sorry if I don't give satisfaction.

GERALD.

On the contrary, you give every satisfaction. It has never been my good fortune to run across a servant who had an equal talent for blacking boots and for repartee. I am grateful for the care with which you have kept my wardrobe, and the encouragement you have offered to my attempts at humour. I have never seen you perturbed by a rebuke, or discouraged by ill-temper. Your merits, in fact, are overwhelming, but I'm afraid I must ask you to find another place.

BLENKINSOP.

You really shouldn't be so abrupt, Gerald. Look at him staggering under the blow.

CHARLES.

I'm very comfortable here, sir. Can you give me no reason for this decision?

GERALD.

You gave it yourself, Charles. As you justly observed, them mining shares is very low. You are sufficiently acquainted with my correspondence to be aware that my creditors have passed with singular unanimity from the stage of remonstrance to that of indignation.

BLENKINSOP.

I say, I'm sorry to hear this, old man.

CHARLES.

If it's just a matter of wages, sir, I shall be 'appy to wait till it suits your convenience to pay me.

GERALD.

[*With a smile of thanks.*] I'm grateful to you for that, Charles; but, honestly, do you think half-measures can be of any use to me?

CHARLES.

Well, sir, so far as I'm acquainted with your circumstances . . .

GERALD.

Come, come, this modesty ill becomes you. Is

there a bill in this room, or a solicitor's letter, with which you are not intimately acquainted?

CHARLES.

Well, sir, if you ask me outright—things is pretty bad.

FREDDIE.

I say, don't play the ass any more. What the deuce does it all mean?

GERALD.

I'm sorry the manner in which I'm imparting to you an interesting piece of information, doesn't meet with your approval. Would you like me to tear my hair in handfuls?

BLENKINSOP.

It would be picturesque, but painful.

FREDDIE.

Are you really broke?

GERALD.

So much so that I've to-day sublet my rooms. In a week, Charles, I shall cast the dust of London off my feet, a victim to the British custom of primogeniture.

CHARLES.

Yes, sir.

GERALD.

Have you the least idea what I mean?

CHARLES.

No, sir.

GERALD.

Well, I feel certain that during some of the many leisure moments you have enjoyed in my service, you have cast an eye upon that page in Burke upon which my name figures—insignificantly.

CHARLES.

Begging your pardon, sir, I looked you up in the Peerage before I accepted the situation.

GERALD.

It rejoices me to learn that your investigations were satisfactory.

CHARLES.

Well, sir, always having lived before with titled gentlemen, I felt I owed it to myself to be careful.

GERALD.

I am overpowered by your condescension, Charles. It never occurred to me that you were taking my character while I was taking yours.

CHARLES.

If servants wanted as good characters from masters as masters want from servants, I 'ave an idea that many gentlemen would 'ave to clean their own boots.

GERALD.

You scintillate, Charles, but I deplore your tendency to digress.

CHARLES.

I beg pardon, sir. As you was the second son of

an honourable and very well connected, I didn't mind stretching a point. If I may say so, your father was almost a nobleman.

GERALD.

The consequence is, however, that I was brought up without in the least knowing how to earn my living. I belong to that vast army of younger sons whose sole means of livelihood is a connection with a peer of the realm and such mother-wit as Dame Nature has provided them with. [*A ring is heard.*

CHARLES.

There's some one at the door, sir. Are you at home?

GERALD.

No, I expect two ladies to tea in half an hour, but you must admit no one else. These gentlemen will be forced to deprive me of their society in twenty-five minutes.

BLENKINSOP.

Not at all. Not at all.

GERALD.

I repeat with considerable firmness that these gentlemen will be compelled by a previous engagement to leave me in *twenty* minutes.

BLENKINSOP.

It'll be difficult after that to make our departure seem perfectly natural, won't it?

[*A second ring is heard.*

GERALD.

Nobody's to come in.

CHARLES.

Very good, sir. [*He goes out.*

BLENKINSOP.

I say, old man, I'm awfully sorry to hear this bad news of yours. Can't I do anything to help you?

GERALD.

No, thanks.

[*The bell is rung continuously, with the greatest impatience.*

FREDDIE.

By Jove, whoever your visitor is, he doesn't like being kept waiting.

MRS. DOT.

[*Outside.*] Is Mr. Halstane at home?

FREDDIE.

[*Softly.*] Why, it's my aunt.

BLENKINSOP.

Mrs. Dot.

GERALD.

Ssh!

CHARLES.

Not at home, madam.

MRS. DOT.

[*Outside.*] Nonsense. I want to see him very particularly.

CHARLES.

I'm very sorry, madam. Mr. Halstane went out not five minutes ago. I almost wonder you didn't meet him on the stairs.

MRS. DOT.

Yes, I know all about that.

[MRS. WORTHLEY *comes in. She is a pretty little woman, very wonderfully gowned. She is frank, open and full of spirits.* CHARLES *follows her into the room.*

MRS. DOT.

Oh! Three of you. Charles, how can you tell such stories?

CHARLES.

[*Very gravely.*] Mr. Halstane is *not* at home, madam.

GERALD.

[*Coming forward and taking her hand.*] Charles is shocked at your lack of decorum.

MRS. DOT.

Run away, Charles. And don't do it again. . . . I suppose you think this sort of thing isn't done in the best families?

CHARLES.

[*Stiffly.*] No, madam.

MRS. DOT.

I saw one of my drays outside, so I thought I'd just look in to see how you liked it.

CHARLES.

[*Icily.*] I beg your pardon, madam?

MRS. DOT.

The beer, my good man, the beer! Don't you know that I'm *Worthley's Entire?*

CHARLES.

I never gave the subject a thought, madam.

MRS. DOT.

And very good our half-crown family ale is, although I say it as shouldn't.

GERALD.

You may go, Charles.

[*Without a word, much on his dignity,* CHARLES *departs.*

GERALD.

[*Gaily.*] It's fortunate I've just given him notice, because Charles would certainly never stay in a house where he'd been so grossly insulted.

MRS. DOT.

I love shocking Charles. He's so genteel. Whenever I come here I see him obviously trying not to show that he's perfectly well aware that I have anything to do with trade.

BLENKINSOP.

The world is so degenerate that it's only among

domestic servants that you find any respect for landed gentry and any contempt for commerce.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* FREDDIE.] I'm glad to see that you're not ruining your health by working too hard as my secretary.

FREDDIE.

I've been lunching with Blenkinsop. I answered about fifty begging letters before I came out this morning.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* GERALD.] You've not said you're glad to see me yet.

GERALD.

I'm not sure that I am, very.

MRS. DOT.

[*Not at all disconcerted.*] Then say you like my frock.

GERALD.

Yes, it's very nice.

MRS. DOT.

Very nice! I should think it was very nice. There's no one in London who'd venture to wear anything half so outrageous. And as for the hat. . . .

BLENKINSOP.

The hat's hideous. But I suppose it's fashionable.

MRS. DOT.

My dear James, where were you educated?

BLENKINSOP.

At Eton.

MRS. DOT.

Well, they taught you nothing about clothes.

BLENKINSOP.

I wish sometimes that nice women wouldn't get themselves up as if they were no better than they should be.

MRS. DOT.

Don't be so absurd. The ideal of a woman who takes any pains about her frocks is to look as like an abandoned hussy as she possibly can.

[MRS. DOT *chooses the most comfortable chair in the room.*

GERALD.

I'm afraid I can't ask you to sit down.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, don't trouble. I'm perfectly capable of doing that of my own accord. . . . If you think I'm going before you've answered a hundred and fifty questions you're very much mistaken. First, I want to know why you've not been near me for the last week? Then why you try to keep me out of the place? And lastly, why you show every desire to get rid of me when I'm here?

GERALD.

I've not seen you because I've been uncommonly busy. I said I was not at home because I'm in the

worst possible temper. And I want to get rid of you because I'm expecting somebody else.

MRS. DOT.

I suppose if I were a thoroughly tactful person I should now ring for my carriage?

GERALD.

I daresay you would ask me to ring for it.

MRS. DOT.

Well, I shall neither do the one nor the other. In the first place your answers are all nonsense and in the second I want to know who's coming? If it's some one I know, I shall stop and say, How d'you do, and if it isn't I want to see what *it's* like.

GERALD.

I suppose you know I'm perfectly capable of turning you out by main force.

MRS. DOT.

If you touch me I shall scream.

[*She looks quickly at* FREDDIE *and* BLENKINSOP, *then gives a smile.*

MRS. DOT.

Oh, Freddie, I quite forgot. I've got a pile of letters that I found on my way out this afternoon. There are three poor clergymen who can't pay their bills, and there are five elderly spinsters who don't know which way to turn for their quarter's rent, and

there are seven deserving ladies with a starving husband each and sixteen children.

BLENKINSOP.

How very immoral!

MRS. DOT.

It would be much more immoral if they had a starving child each and sixteen husbands.

BLENKINSOP.

I suppose it's never occurred to you that you do a great deal more harm than good by your indiscriminate charity?

MRS. DOT.

Don't be such an old frump. If it gives me a certain amount of pleasure to give money away, why on earth shouldn't I? I daresay that nineteen out of every twenty people I help are thoroughly worthless, but it's only by doing something for them all that I can be quite certain of not missing the twentieth.

FREDDIE.

D'you want me to write to them at once?

MRS. DOT.

This very minute.

FREDDIE.

[*With a smile.*] But that'll only get rid of me, you know. Blenkinsop will still be here.

MRS. DOT.

[*Coolly.*] James, do go and see that Freddie writes

his letters nicely. He's only just come down from Oxford, and his spelling is rather shaky.

BLENKINSOP.

[*With a grunt.*] You can give us a shout when you've had your talk.

MRS. DOT.

Now mind, Freddie. I before E except after C.

[*They go out.*

GERALD.

[*Laughing.*] You're a very bold woman, Mrs. Dot.

MRS. DOT.

[*With a change of tone.*] What's the matter, Gerald?

GERALD.

[*Surprised.*] With me?

MRS. DOT.

Won't you tell an old friend?

GERALD.

[*After a very short pause.*] Nothing that you can help me in, Mrs. Dot.

MRS. DOT.

Won't you leave the Mrs. out? It makes me feel so five and thirtyish.

GERALD.

You're a ripping good sort, and we've had some charming times together. I'm glad that you came

to-day, because it's given me an opportunity to thank you for all your kindness to me.

MRS. DOT.

My dear boy, what *are* you talking about?

GERALD.

Well, the fact is, I've been spending a good deal of money lately, and I'm rather broke.

MRS. DOT.

How stupid of me! I've always had such lots myself it never occurs to me that any one else may be hard up. And I've let you pay all sorts of things for me, theatres and dinners and heaven knows what. I must owe you a perfect fortune.

GERALD.

Nonsense! You don't owe me a penny.

MRS. DOT.

Well then, in future I insist on paying for everything. I'm not going to give up our little dinners at the Savoy and our suppers and all the rest of it. Don't be so silly. You know I have ten times more money than I know what to do with.

GERALD.

Yes, I can see you furtively slipping your purse into my hand so that I should pay for a luncheon, and giving me a shilling over for the cab. No, thank you.

MRS. DOT.

Then we'll economise together. It only means

going to the pit of a theatre instead of taking a box. Well, I like the pit much better. You see all the women come in and you criticise their back hair. And you suck delicious oranges all the time. It makes my mouth water to think of it. And we'll go on a bus instead of taking cabs. They're much safer, and I like sitting on the front seat and talking to the driver. Bus-drivers are always such handsome men.

GERALD.

It's not a question of driving in buses, but of walking on my flat feet.

MRS. DOT.

Very well. You shall walk on your flat feet, and I'll trip along by your side on my arched instep.

GERALD.

Things have come to such a pass that I must either beg, steal, or work.

MRS. DOT.

Then tell me exactly how matters stand.

GERALD.

It would only bore you, and besides you wouldn't understand.

MRS. DOT.

Now you're talking through your hat, my friend. You're simply talking through your hat. I flatter myself there are few men who have a better head for business than I have. Why, since my husband died I've almost doubled our profits. The brewery has

never been so flourishing. I've told the British People on fifty thousand hoardings to drink Worthley's Half-crown Family Ale, and by Jove, the British People do.

GERALD.

You funny little thing.

MRS. DOT.

Well, now tell me all about it, and let's see if things can't be put straight.

GERALD.

Oh, my dear, I'm afraid they're in a most awful mess. I never had much money to start with, and I got into debt. Then I tried a flutter on the Stock Exchange, and the confounded shares went down steadily from the day I bought.

MRS. DOT.

It's a way shares have when fools buy them.

GERALD.

But I daresay I could have weathered that, only a pal of mine got into a hole, and I backed a bill for him.

MRS. DOT.

You don't mean to say you did that?

GERALD.

I was obliged to. I couldn't let him go under without trying to do something.

MRS. DOT.

You donkey, you perfect donkey!

GERALD.

He swore he'd be able to pay the money.

MRS. DOT.

I never knew a man yet, or a woman either for that matter, who'd stick at a thundering lie when he wanted money. And what's the result?

GERALD.

Well, the result is that after I've paid everything up, I shall have about five hundred pounds left. I'm proposing to go out to America and rough it a bit.

MRS. DOT.

Pardon my asking, but do you think a handsome face, a talent for small talk, and a certain charm of manner will enable you to earn your daily bread?

GERALD.

[*Laughing.*] I don't want to seem vain, but although I've done my best to conceal them, I fancy I have two or three other qualifications which will be of more service.

MRS. DOT.

Then the long and the short of it is that you're ruined.

GERALD.

Absolutely.

MRS. DOT.

I'm delighted to hear it.

GERALD.

Dot!

MRS. DOT.

I am. I can't help it. But I think your plan of going to the States is simply foolish.

GERALD.

What else *can* I do? The Cape's entirely played out.

MRS. DOT.

You stupid creature.

GERALD.

I beg your pardon!

MRS. DOT.

You belong to a class whose chief resource when it has squandered its money is a rich marriage. The custom is so well recognised that when a man of good family emigrates rather than have recourse to it, society is outraged and suspicious.

GERALD.

Thanks. I don't think I can see myself marrying for money.

MRS. DOT.

Don't be so absurd. I never heard that the course of true love ran any less smoothly because a charming widow had sixty thousand a year.

GERALD.

What *do* you mean?

MRS. DOT.

My dear boy, I'm not a perfect fool. A man thinks

a woman never sees anything unless she looks at it with both eyes at once wide open. Don't you know that she can see things through the back of her head with a stone wall in between?

GERALD.

What have you seen, then?

MRS. DOT.

I've seen a thousand things. I've seen your eyes light up when I came into the room, I've seen you watch me when you thought I wasn't looking. I've seen you scowl at any young fool who paid me an outrageous compliment. I've seen the pleasure it gave you to do me any trifling service. I've seen you watch for the opportunity of putting my cloak on my shoulders after the play. And—I'm sorry—but I've come to the conclusion that you're in love with me. I dare say the fact has escaped your notice, but that's only because men are so deplorably stupid.

GERALD.

[*Gravely.*] D'you think it's quite kind to laugh at me now?

MRS. DOT.

But I'm not laughing at you, my dear. I'm so pleased, and so flattered and so touched. At first I thought I was only a fool, and that I saw those things only because I wanted to. And when your hand trembled a little as it took mine, I was afraid it was only my hand that was trembling. And at last when I was certain that you were just as much in love with me as I was with you, I was so glad that I cried

for two hours. And I had to use a whole box of powder before I could make myself presentable again.

GERALD.

[*Grimly.*] I'm afraid you'll think me an utter brute. I ought to have told you long ago that I'm engaged to be married.

MRS. DOT.

Gerald!

GERALD.

I've been engaged to Nellie Sellenger for the last three years.

MRS. DOT.

Why didn't you tell me?

GERALD.

No one was supposed to know anything about it. And—I was afraid of losing you. Oh, Dot, Dot, I love you with all my heart. And I'm so glad to be forced to tell you at last.

MRS. DOT.

But I don't understand in the least.

GERALD.

You know Nellie Sellenger is an old friend of mine.

MRS. DOT.

Yes, it was at the Sellengers' I first met you.

GERALD.

Well, three years ago we were staying at the same place in the country, and I was a young fool.

MRS. DOT.

You mean that there was no other girl there, and so you flirted with her. But you need not have asked her to marry you.

GERALD.

[*Apologetically.*] It was the merest accident. It came to pieces in my 'ands, so to speak.

MRS. DOT.

Really?

GERALD.

We were taking a walk in the garden after dinner, and a perfectly absurd moon was shining. It seemed the obvious thing to do.

MRS. DOT.

And of course she accepted. The girl of eighteen always does.

GERALD.

But Lady Sellenger refused to hear of it. She thought me most ineligible.

MRS. DOT.

Lady Sellenger's a sensible woman. She was quite right.

GERALD.

I'm not so sure. If she'd given us her blessing and told us to do as we liked, we should probably have broken it off in three weeks. But she was really rather offensive about it. She refused to let Nellie see me, and the result was that we were

always running across one another in Bond Street tea-shops.

MRS. DOT.

Monstrous! And so bad for the digestion.

GERALD.

Some time ago Lady Sellenger found out that we were writing to one another and so on, so she came to see me and said she'd made up her mind to take Nellie abroad for a year. She made me promise to hold no communication with her during that time, and agreed that if we were still of the same mind when they came back, she would withdraw the opposition and let us be properly engaged.

MRS. DOT.

An announcement in the *Morning Post* and all that sort of thing?

GERALD.

I suppose so.

MRS. DOT.

And when are they coming back?

GERALD.

They came back last week. But I haven't had a chance of speaking to Nellie yet. The year is up to-day, and this morning I had a note from Lady Sellenger asking if they might come to tea.

MRS. DOT.

And what are you going to say to her?

GERALD.

Good heavens! What can I say? I was poor enough a year ago, but now I'm penniless. I'm bound to ask for my release.

MRS. DOT.

Then why on earth have you been trying to make me utterly miserable?

GERALD.

You know, I don't want to seem an awful prig, but I don't think I should much like doing anything shabby. If Nellie wants me to keep my promise I shan't draw back.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, but she won't. She'll be only too glad to get rid of you.

GERALD.

I'm afraid there's something else I must tell you.

MRS. DOT.

More? Don't say you've got a horrible past, because I shan't turn a hair.

GERALD.

No, it's not that. You know that Lord Hollington is a relation of mine.

MRS. DOT.

Only a fifteenth cousin, isn't he? Far too distant to brag about.

GERALD.

A year ago three lives stood between me and the

peerage. It seemed impossible that I could ever come into anything.

MRS. DOT.

Well?

GERALD.

But last winter my cousin George unfortunately broke his neck in the hunting-field, and his poor old father died of the shock. If anything happened to my cousin Charles everything would come to me.

MRS. DOT.

And Lady Sellenger would doubtless withdraw her opposition to your marriage.

GERALD.

She's a very nice woman, but she has rather a keen eye for the main chance.

MRS. DOT.

Even her best friend would hesitate to call her disinterested. But why should anything happen to Lord Hollington? He's quite young, isn't he? I saw his engagement announced in the *Morning Post* a little while ago.

GERALD.

He's out in India at this moment. He's a soldier, you know. It appears there's some trouble on the North-West Frontier, and he's in command of the expedition.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, but nothing is going to happen to him. He'll live till he's eighty.

GERALD.

I'm sure I hope he will.

MRS. DOT.

Say again that you love me, Gerald.

GERALD.

[*Smiling.*] I oughtn't to yet.

MRS. DOT.

You know, you've got to marry me. I insist upon it. After all, you've been trifling with my affections shamefully. Oh, we shall be so happy, Gerald. And we'll never grow any older than we are now. You know, I'm an awfully good sort, really. I talk a lot of nonsense, but I don't mean it. I very seldom listen to it myself. I'm sick of society. I want to settle down and be domesticated. I'll sit at home and darn your socks. And I shall hate it, and I shall be so happy. And if you want to be independent you can have a job at the brewery. We want a smart energetic man to keep us up to the times. And we'll have a lovely box at the opera, and you can always get away for the shooting. [*A ring is heard.*

GERALD.

There they are.

MRS. DOT.

Good heavens! I quite forgot about those wretched people in there.

[*She opens the door of the dining-room.*

MRS. DOT.

I don't want to disturb you, but if you've quite finished your conversation perhaps you'd like to come and have tea.

[BLENKINSOP *and* FREDDIE *come in and go to the fire.*

BLENKINSOP.

I observe with interest that your remark is facetious.

FREDDIE.

I'm simply freezing.

MRS. DOT.

You didn't mind being shut up in there, did you?

BLENKINSOP.

Not at all. I rather like sitting in an arctic room without a fire, with a window looking on a blank wall, and the society of your nephew and the *Sporting Times* of the week before last as my only means of entertainment.

[CHARLES *enters to announce the* SELLENGERS. *He goes out and brings in the tea.*

CHARLES.

Lady and Miss Sellenger.

[*Enter* LADY SELLENGER *and* NELLIE. LADY SELLENGER *is a pompous woman of fifty, stout, alert and clever.* NELLIE *is very pretty and graceful, and fashionably gowned. She appears to be much under her mother's influence.*

LADY SELLENGER.

How d'you do? Ah, Mrs. Worthley! Delightful

GERALD.

[*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? I think you know Mr. Blenkinsop?

LADY SELLENGER.

Of course. But I don't approve of him.

BLENKINSOP.

Why not?

LADY SELLENGER.

Because you're a cynic, a millionaire, and a bachelor. And no man has the right to be all three.

MRS. DOT.

And how did you like Italy?

LADY SELLENGER.

A grossly over-rated place. So many marriageable daughters and so few eligible men.

GERALD.

[*Introducing.*] Mr. Perkins, Lady Sellenger—Miss Sellenger.

MRS. DOT.

My nephew and my secretary.

LADY SELLENGER.

Really. How very interesting! Almost romantic.

FREDDIE.

How d'you do?

LADY SELLENGER.

Dear Mrs. Worthley, what a charming gown! You always wear such—striking things.

MRS. DOT.

It advertises the beer, don't you know.

LADY SELLENGER.

I wish I could drink it, Mrs. Worthley, but it's so fattening. I understand you always have it on your table.

MRS. DOT.

I think that's the least I can do, as it's only on account of the beer that I can have a table at all.

NELLIE.

[*To* MRS. DOT.] May I give you some tea?

MRS. DOT.

[*Going to the tea-table.*] Thanks so much.

[GERALD *comes over to* LADY SELLENGER *with a cup. She takes it. The others are gathered round the tea-table, which is right at the back, and talk among themselves.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Come and sit by me, Gerald. I've not had a word with you since we came back from Italy.

GERALD.

[*Lightly.*] What are you going to say to me?

LADY SELLENGER.

You can guess why I wrote to ask if we might come and see you to-day?

GERALD.

[*Rising.*] Yes.

LADY SELLENGER.

Now do sit down. And look as if you were talking of the weather.

GERALD.

It's a little difficult to discuss the matter quite indifferently.

LADY SELLENGER.

My dear boy, it's the little difficulties of life which prevent it from being dull. We should be no better

than the beasts of the field if we had no anxieties about our soul and our position in society.

GERALD.

I see.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Rather impatiently.*] My dear Gerald, why don't you help me? What I have to say is so very unpleasant. You know I have always had a most sincere affection for you. Under other circumstances I would have wanted no better son-in-law.

GERALD.

It's very kind of you to say so.

LADY SELLENGER.

I've assured you for the last three years that a marriage was absurd, and now I want to tell you that it's impossible. Love is all very well in its way, but it doesn't make up for a shabby house in the suburbs.

GERALD.

You're not romantic, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER.

My dear, when you reach my age you'll agree with me that it's only the matter of fact which really signifies. Love in a cottage is a delusion of youth. It's difficult enough after ten years of solid matrimony in Grosvenor Square.

GERALD.

You married for love, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER.

I'm anxious that my daughter shouldn't make the same mistake. Now let us be quite frank with one another. . . . Are you sure they're not listening?

GERALD.

[*Glancing at the others.*] They seem very much occupied with their own affairs. What is your ultimatum?

LADY SELLENGER.

Well, Gerald, I'm not in the least mercenary. I know that money can't give happiness. But I do feel that unless you have at least two thousand a year you can't make my daughter even comfortable.

GERALD.

I'm sure that's very modest.

LADY SELLENGER.

It's not love in a cottage. It's not love in a palace. It's just—matrimony in Onslow Gardens.

GERALD.

I may as well tell you at once that I've had very bad luck. I wanted to make money, and I've come an absolute cropper.

LADY SELLENGER

My dear Gerald, I'm very sorry. Is it as bad as all that?

GERALD.

It couldn't be much worse.

LADY SELLENGER.

Dear me, that's very sad. But, of course, it simplifies matters, doesn't it?

GERALD.

Enormously. It puts marriage entirely out of the question and leaves only one course open to me. I'll take the earliest opportunity to ask Nellie for my release.

LADY SELLENGER.

What a pity it is you're so poor! Your principles are really excellent.

GERALD.

But what about Nellie? How will she take it?

LADY SELLENGER.

She's so reserved, poor dear! She never speaks of her feelings. But after three London seasons most girls have learnt to bow to the inevitable. And how is Lord Hollington?

GERALD.

He's to be married as soon as he comes back from India.

LADY SELLENGER.

It was dreadfully sad that his uncle and his cousin should die within a year. If anything happened to him you'd be in very different circumstances. But, of course, it would be wicked to wish it. I hope you never do.

GERALD.

Never. I trust he'll live to a hundred.

LADY SELLENGER.

And I daresay he'll have fifteen children. Those delicate men often do. . . . Why don't you speak to Nellie now and get it over?

GERALD.

This very minute? With others in the room?

LADY SELLENGER.

That's just it, I want to give neither of you any opportunity for sentiment.

GERALD.

You're certainly very practical.

LADY SELLENGER.

No woman can afford to be sentimental when she has a marriageable daughter. . . . For heaven's sake don't make Nellie cry, we're dining out to-night.

GERALD.

I'll do my best to be very matter of fact.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Raising her voice.*] Mr. Blenkinsop, I want to quarrel with you!

BLENKINSOP.

[*Coming forward.*] You fill me with consternation.

LADY SELLENGER.

You passed us in Pall Mall this afternoon and you cut us dead.

BLENKINSOP.

I'm so sorry, I didn't see you. I'd just been to the War Office to inquire if there was any news of those fellows out in India. By the way, Halstane, isn't Hollington a relation of yours?

GERALD.

Yes, why?

BLENKINSOP.

Haven't you seen anything in the paper?

GERALD.

No.

BLENKINSOP.

Oh, but surely. There's sure to be something about it in the *Westminster*. [*He takes up the paper.*

GERALD.

That's an early one.

[*Faintly are heard the cries of "Special."*

FREDDIE.

Listen, there's the last edition coming along.

LADY SELLENGER.

But what is it, Mr. Blenkinsop?

BLENKINSOP.

A small force was sent out to punish some local people up in the hills, who'd been making themselves troublesome, and it hasn't been heard of since. The idea is that there may have been some trouble and they've all got cut up.

MRS. DOT.

But how does it concern Lord Hollington?

BLENKINSOP.

He was in command of it.

GERALD.

Good God!

BLENKINSOP.

When I was there a couple of hours ago the War Office had no news at all.

GERALD.

But why didn't you tell me about it?

BLENKINSOP.

I thought you knew. I'd forgotten for the moment

that Hollington had anything to do with you. He's a very distant relation, isn't he?

GERALD.

Yes, I hardly know him.

LADY SELLENGER.

But if anything has happened to him . . .

[*Cries outside of "Special, Special."*

MRS. DOT.

Why don't you get a paper? Freddie, run and get one, will you?

GERALD.

No, Charles can go.

[*He rings, and* CHARLES *immediately comes in.*

GERALD.

Oh, Charles, get a paper at once. Hurry up!

CHARLES.

Very good, sir.

[*He goes out. Outside, cries of "Terrible catastrophe in India."*

GERALD.

By Jove, did you hear that?

[*Cries of "Special, Special."*

LADY SELLENGER.

Why doesn't he make haste?

GERALD.

Nonsense. It can't have anything to do with Hollington.

MRS. DOT.

[*With her hand on his arm, anxiously.*] Gerald.

[FREDDIE PERKINS *is looking out of the window.*

FREDDIE.

Here's Charles. By Jove, he isn't hurrying himself much.

GERALD.

Has he got a newsboy?

FREDDIE.

Yes. What the deuce is he doing?

GERALD.

[*At the window.*] Good lord, he's reading the paper.

LADY SELLENGER.

The suspense is too awful.

FREDDIE.

There's another newsboy running down the street.

[*Cries of "Special, Special."*

GERALD.

Thank God, he's coming upstairs at last. I should like to kick him.

[*Cries of "Terrible catastrophe in India. 'Eroic death of Lord 'Ollington."*

Good God!

[*They all remain in silence, full of consternation* CHARLES *enters with the paper.*

Hurry up, man! What the deuce have you been doing? [*He snatches the paper from him.*

CHARLES.

[*With dignity.*] I made all the 'aste I could, my lord.

[GERALD *stops for a moment from looking up and down the paper, and stares at him.*

GERALD.

What the dickens d'you mean?

[*He looks at the paper, reads, and drops it.*

MRS. DOT.

Is it true, Gerald?

[*He looks at her and nods.*

GERALD.

Poor chap. And just as he was going to be married.

CHARLES.

Shall I bring your hat and coat, my lord?

GERALD.

What on earth are you talking about?

CHARLES.

I thought your lordship would like to go round to the War Office.

GERALD.

Shut up! [*Exit* CHARLES.

LADY SELLENGER.

My dear boy, I congratulate you with all my heart.

GERALD.

Oh, don't remind me of that already.

LADY SELLENGER.

I can quite understand you're a little upset, but after all he was only a very distant relation of yours.

BLENKINSOP.

I don't understand what all this means.

GERALD.

Didn't you hear that fool of a servant? It was the first thing he thought of.

MRS. DOT.

Gerald succeeds to the peerage!

GERALD.

Yes

MRS. DOT.

Wouldn't you like us to leave you alone? I'm sure you want to think things out a bit?

LADY SELLINGER.

Come, Nellie!

GERALD.

I'm sorry to turn you out. Good-bye. I had something to say to you, Nellie.

NELLIE.

We've not had a chance of speaking to one another.

LADY SELLINGER.

[*Unctuously.*] It's very fortunate. Now you'll have much pleasanter things to talk about.

[*He stares at her without understanding.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Things are very different now, Gerald. It just came in time, didn't it?

NELLIE.

Good-bye.

[LADY SELLENGER *and* NELLIE *go out.*

BLENKINSOP.

Good-bye, old man, I'm sorry your cousin has had such an awful death But after all, we none of us knew him and we do know you. I can't tell you how glad I am that all your difficulties are at an end.

GERALD.

I would give my right hand to bring Hollington back to life again.

BLENKINSOP.

Good-bye. [*He goes out.*

MRS. DOT.

Go away, Freddie. I want to talk to Gerald.

FREDDIE.

Good-bye, old man. I say, what a nice girl Miss Sellenger is!

GERALD.

Good-bye. [FREDDIE *goes out.*

MRS. DOT.

Well?

GERALD.

The news has come just an hour too soon. It's bound me hand and foot.

MRS. DOT.

What d'you mean by that?

GERALD.

Nellie accepted me when I was poor and of no account. Now that I'm well off I can't go to her and say: I've changed my mind and don't want to marry you.

MRS. DOT.

What d'you mean by being well off?

GERALD.

I believe I shall have six or seven thousand a year.

MRS. DOT.

But you can't live on that. It's absurd.

GERALD.

[*With a smile.*] There are people who live on much less, you know.

MRS. DOT.

Besides, she doesn't care for you in the least. I could see that at a glance.

GERALD.

How?

MRS. DOT.

A girl who loved you wouldn't have a skirt cut like that.

GERALD.

I can't draw back now, Dot. You must see that I can't.

MRS. DOT.

If you cared for me, you'd easily find some way out of the difficulty.

GERALD.

I must be honest, Dot. . . . I don't want to seem a snob, but I've got an ancient name, and it's

rather honourable. I'm by way of being the head of the family now. I don't want to begin by acting like a cad.

MRS. DOT.

You know, I'm much nicer than Nellie. I'm more amusing, and I'm better dressed, and I've got five motor cars. It's true she's younger than I am, but I don't feel a day more than seventeen. [*With a little look at him.*] And if you had any sense of decency at all you'd say I looked it. You said you loved me just now. Say it again, Gerald. It's so good to hear.

GERALD.

I don't see how we can help ourselves.

MRS. DOT.

[*Beginning to lose her temper.*] I suppose you just want to finish an awkward scene? I don't want to harrow you. Why don't you go to the War Office?

GERALD.

You must see it's not my fault. If we must part, let us part friends.

MRS. DOT.

Now, I declare he wants to sentimentalise. Isn't it enough that you've made me frightfully unhappy? D'you want me to say it doesn't matter at all, as if you'd spilt a cup of tea on me? D'you think I like being utterly wretched?

GERALD.

For heaven's sake, don't talk like that. You're tearing my heart to pieces.

MRS. DOT.

Your heart? I should like to bang it on the floor and stamp on it. You must expect to suffer a little. You can't put it all on me.

GERALD.

I don't want you to suffer.

MRS. DOT.

[*In a temper.*] You were willing enough to marry me when you hadn't got sixpence to bless yourself with. How fortunate your cousin didn't die a week later!

GERALD.

Do you think I was proposing to marry you for your money?

MRS. DOT.

Yes.

GERALD.

Really?

MRS. DOT.

No, of course not.

GERALD.

Thanks.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, you needn't take it as a compliment. I'd much sooner have to deal with a clever knave than an honest fool.

GERALD.

Won't you say that you bear me no ill-will?

MRS. DOT.

No.

GERALD.

I really must go to the War Office.

MRS. DOT.

Very well, you can go.

GERALD.

Won't you come with me?

MRS. DOT.

No.

GERALD.

I'm afraid you'll get rather bored here.

[*He rings the bell, and* CHARLES *comes in.*

CHARLES.

Yes, my lord.

GERALD.

I want my hat and coat. [CHARLES *goes out*

MRS. DOT.

Do you care for Nellie Sellenger?

GERALD.

If you don't mind, I won't answer that question. Unless she asks for her freedom, I propose to marry her.

[CHARLES *brings in the hat and coat.* MRS. DOT *watches him while he puts them on.*

GERALD.

Good-bye.

[*He goes out.* MRS. DOT *turns round and faces* CHARLES.

MRS. DOT.

Charles, have you ever been married?

CHARLES.

Twice, madam.

MRS. DOT.

And has experience taught you that when a woman wants a thing she generally gets it?

CHARLES.

[*With a sigh.*] It has, madam.

MRS. DOT.

That is my opinion, too, Charles.

[*She goes out.* CHARLES *begins to clear the tea things away.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The terrace of MRS. DOT'S *house on the River. There are masses of rose trees in full flower. At the back is the house, covered with creepers.*

A table is set out for luncheon, with four chairs.

MISS MACGREGOR *is sitting in a garden chair, sewing. She is an elderly, quiet woman, thin, somewhat angular, good-humoured and amiable.*

MRS. DOT *is walking up and down impatiently.*

AUNT ELIZA.

My dear, why don't you sit down and rest yourself? I'm sure you've walked at least ten miles up and down this terrace.

MRS. DOT.

I'm in a temper.

AUNT ELIZA.

That must be obvious to the meanest intelligence.

MRS. DOT.

Have you read the paper to-day?

AUNT ELIZA.

I've tried to, but as you've spent most of the

morning in stamping on it, I haven't had much success.

MRS. DOT.

Then I beg you to listen to this: [*Taking up a "Morning Post" and reading it.*] A marriage has been arranged between Lord Hollington and Eleanor, only daughter of the late General Sir Robert Sellenger. [*She crumples up the paper and stamps on it.*

AUNT ELIZA.

That's the twenty-third time you've read this announcement to me. I assure you that it's beginning to lose its novelty.

MRS. DOT.

You can't deny that it's rather annoying to take up your paper in the morning and discover an official announcement that the man you've made up your mind to marry is taking serious steps to marry somebody else.

AUNT ELIZA.

But would you tell me why you want to marry him?

MRS. DOT.

Why does anybody ever want to marry anybody?

AUNT ELIZA.

That is a question to which during the fifty-five years of my life I've been totally unable to discover an answer.

MRS. DOT.

Well, because he's clever, and handsome, and amusing.

AUNT ELIZA.

He's not really very clever, you know.

MRS. DOT.

Of course he isn't. He's as stupid as an owl I've told him so till I'm blue in the face.

AUNT ELIZA.

And he's not really very good-looking, is he?

MRS. DOT.

On the contrary, I think he's rather plain.

AUNT ELIZA.

I suppose you find him amusing?

MRS. DOT.

Not at all. I find him dull.

AUNT ELIZA.

Then, perhaps, you can find me some other explanation.

MRS. DOT.

Well, I'm head over ears in love with him.

AUNT ELIZA.

But why, my dear? Why?

MRS. DOT.

Because I am. That's the most conclusive reason possible. And I've set my heart on marrying him

And the more obstacles there are the more I mean to marry him.

AUNT ELIZA.

I can't imagine why you hadn't the sense to fall in love with one of the various eligible persons who want to marry you.

MRS. DOT.

But he *does* want to marry me. He's desperately in love with me.

AUNT ELIZA.

I should have thought he could find a better way of showing it than by getting engaged to somebody else.

MRS. DOT.

He's a sentimentalist, like all his sex. Good heavens, what a mess the world would get into if it weren't for the practical common sense of the average women.

AUNT ELIZA.

And what do you propose to do?

MRS. DOT.

That's just it. I don't in the least know. They'll all be here in half an hour, and I haven't the shadow of a scheme. I lie awake all night racking my brains, and I can't think of anything.

AUNT ELIZA.

Why did you ask them to come here?

MRS. DOT.

I thought I might hit upon something if they were under my eyes. Gerald had promised to spend Whitsun with me and, so that he shouldn't put me off, I asked the Sellengers, too. Lady Sellenger was only too glad to get a week's board and lodging for nothing. [*The sound is heard of a motor stopping.*] There's Jimmie Blenkinsop. I told you he was going to motor down in time for luncheon, didn't I? [BLENKINSOP *comes in with* FREDDIE. FREDDIE *has on a gay tweed suit.*] Jimmie!

BLENKINSOP.

How d'you do?

[*He shakes hands with* MRS. DOT *and* AUNT ELIZA.

MRS. DOT.

Now we'll have luncheon. You must be starving with hunger.

BLENKINSOP.

You must let me wash first.

MRS. DOT.

No, we're all far too hungry. Freddie will go and wash his hands for you.

[*She rings half a dozen times quickly on a little bell on the table.*

FREDDIE.

I shall be back in one minute. [*He goes out.*

MRS. DOT.

Now sit down. I'm perfectly ravenous.

[THE BUTLER *and the* FOOTMAN *bring in luncheon, which is eaten during the next scene.*

AUNT ELIZA.

I perceive that the tender passion hasn't in the least interfered with your appetite.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, my dear James, I'm so unhappy.

BLENKINSOP.

You look it.

MRS. DOT.

By the way, how do I look?

BLENKINSOP.

All right. You've changed your cook

MRS. DOT.

Hang my cook.

BLENKINSOP.

I wouldn't if I were you. She's very good.

MRS. DOT.

Of course you'll drink the family ale?

BLENKINSOP.

Of course I'll do nothing of the kind.

MRS. DOT.

You know it's one of my principles to have it on the table.

BLENKINSOP.

Yes, but it's one of my principles not to drink it. I seem to remember that you have some particularly fine hock.

MRS. DOT.

Jimmie, have you never been in love?

BLENKINSOP.

Never, thank God.

MRS. DOT.

I don't believe it. Every one's in love. I'm in love.

BLENKINSOP.

Not with me, I trust.

MRS. DOT.

You perfect idiot.

BLENKINSOP.

Not at all. I should think it very natural.

MRS. DOT.

I wonder why you never married, James.

BLENKINSOP.

Because I have a considerable gift for repartee. I discovered in my early youth that men propose not because they want to marry, but because on certain

occasions they are entirely at a loss for topics of conversation.

AUNT ELIZA.

[*Smiling.*] It was a momentous discovery.

BLENKINSOP.

No sooner had I made it than I began to cultivate my power of small talk. I felt that my only chance was to be ready with appropriate subjects at the shortest notice, and I spent a considerable part of my last year at Oxford in studying the best masters.

MRS. DOT.

I never noticed that you were particularly brilliant.

BLENKINSOP.

I never played for brilliancy. I played for safety. I flatter myself that when prattle was needed I have never been found wanting. I have met the ingenuity of sweet seventeen with a few observations on Free Trade, while the haggard efforts of thirty have struggled in vain against a brief exposition of the higher philosophy. The skittish widow of uncertain age has retired in disorder before a complete acquaintance with the restoration dramatists, and I have routed the serious spinster with religious leanings by my remarkable knowledge of the results of missionary endeavour in Central Africa. Once a dowager sought to ask me my intentions, but I flung at her astonished head an entire article from the "Encyclopædia Britannica." These are only my serious efforts. I need not tell you how often I have

evaded a flash of the eyes by an epigram or ignored a sigh by an apt quotation from the poets.

MRS. DOT.

I don't believe a word you say. I believe you never married for the simple reason that nobody would have you.

BLENKINSOP.

Do me the justice to acknowledge that I'm the only man who's known you ten days without being tempted by your preposterous income to offer you his hand and heart.

MRS. DOT.

I don't believe my income has anything to do with it. I put it down entirely to my very considerable personal attractions.

AUNT ELIZA.

Here is Freddie, at last. What has he been doing?

[FREDDIE *comes in, having changed into flannels.*

MRS. DOT.

Why on earth have you changed your clothes?

FREDDIE.

[*Sitting down at table.*] I regard it as part of my duties as your secretary to look nice.

MRS. DOT.

I don't know that I think it essential for you to put on seven different suits a day.

FREDDIE.

I thought Miss Sellenger would probably like to go on the river before tea.

AUNT ELIZA.

If she does, it's more likely to be with Lord Hollington than with you.

FREDDIE.

Oh, that's rot. Gerald's an awfully good sort, but he's not the sort of chap a girl's desperately fond of.

MRS. DOT.

You think that, do you?

FREDDIE.

Well, you can't see yourself falling in love with him can you?

MRS. DOT.

No. No.

AUNT ELIZA.

And what is the sort of man a girl's desperately fond of?

FREDDIE.

Oh, I don't know. [*Taking up a spoon and looking at himself, twisting an infinitesimal moustache.*] I should think some one a bit younger than Gerald.

MRS. DOT.

[*With a little shriek.*] You!

FREDDIE.

You needn't be so surprised. One might do worse, you know.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* AUNT ELIZA *pointing with a scornful finger at* FREDDIE.] Do you think any one could possibly fall in love with that?

AUNT ELIZA.

Of course not.

FREDDIE.

I say, come now. That's a bit thick.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* BLENKINSOP.] If you were a young and lovely maiden would you fall in love with Freddie?

BLENKINSOP.

[*Looking at him doubtfully,*] Well, if you ask me point blank I don't think I should.

FREDDIE.

You're all of you jolly supercilious.

MRS. DOT.

He's not positively plain, is he?

BLENKINSOP.

Not positively.

FREDDIE.

Look here, you shut up. I bet I could cut you out with any girl you like to mention.

BLENKINSOH.

Rubbish!

MRS. DOT.

I daresay he can whisper nonsense in a woman's ear as well as any one else.

AUNT ELIZA.

It's born in them, the brutes.

BLENKINSOP.

Pooh! I wouldn't waste my time on whispering nonsense. I'd just send my pass-book round by a messenger boy.

FREDDIE.

Well, I flatter myself Miss Sellenger will be much more pleased to see *me* than to see anybody else down here.

BLENKINSOP.

You've only seen her once.

FREDDIE.

She's a jolly nice girl, I can tell you that.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Ironically.*] I suppose she squeezed your hand when you went away?

FREDDIE.

Well, it so happens, she did.

BLENKINSOP.

You needn't be set up about it, because she squeezed mine, too. It's evidently a habit.

FREDDIE.

Yours! What rot!

[MRS. DOT *has been staring at him, with both elbows on the table. A servant is standing at her side with a tray on which is the coffee.*

AUNT ELIZA.

Thompson is offering you some coffee, my dear.

MRS. DOT.

[*Absently.*] Take it away.

FREDDIE.

What on earth are you staring at? Isn't my tie all right?

MRS. DOT.

You certainly are rather good-looking. I've never noticed it before.

FREDDIE.

It's no good, you know. You're my aunt, and the prayer book wouldn't let you marry me.

MRS. DOT.

Now I come to think of it, I daresay you're quite grown up to any one who didn't know you in Etons.

FREDDIE.

I don't know what on earth you're talking about.

MRS. DOT.

I suppose a girl might quite easily fall in love with you. It had never occurred to me.

BLENKINSOP.

Which means that you've found him a wife, and you're going to marry him to some one whether he likes it or not.

MRS. DOT.

[*Suddenly.*] Freddie.

FREDDIE.

Hulloa!

MRS. DOT.

Go away and play.

FREDDIE.

Hang it all, I want to drink my coffee.

MRS. DOT.

Go and make a mud pie in the garden. There's a dear.

[*A bell is heard ringing loudly.*

AUNT ELIZA.

There they are!

MRS. DOT.

Come on!

[*They all get up.* MRS. DOT *and* AUNT ELIZA *go out.* FREDDIE *and* BLENKINSOP *light cigarettes.*

FREDDIE.

What's the matter with my virtuous aunt?

BLENKINSOP.

How old are you, dear boy?

FREDDIE.

Twenty-two. Why?

BLENKINSOP.

The delightful age when it's still possible to feel desperately wicked. But you are old enough to have learnt that the moods of women are inscrutable.

FREDDIE.

Oh, rot! I never met a woman whom I couldn't read at a glance.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Ironically.*] Really?

FREDDIE.

You know, they talk about the incomprehensibility of women, but it's all humbug.

BLENKINSOP.

When you see a blank wall, does it *ever* occur to you that there's anything on the other side?

[MRS. DOT *and* AUNT ELIZA *come in with* LADY SELLENGER, NELLIE *and* HOLLINGTON. *They are all talking.*

LADY SELLENGER.

We had a delightful journey. Oh, how beautiful your garden is! So romantic. I love romance.

BLENKINSOP.

When it's backed by an adequate income.

LADY SELLENGER.

How d'you do? You cynic.

BLENKINSOP.

I'm nothing of the sort. But I occasionally tell the truth.

LADY SELLENGER.

You're the most cynical man in London, and I'm frightened to death of you.

BLENKINSOP.

There's nothing the world loves more than a ready-made description which they can hang on to a man, and so save themselves all trouble in future. When I was quite young it occurred to some one that I was a cynic, and since then I've never been able to remark that it was a fine day without being accused of odious cynicism.

LADY SELLENGER.

My dear Mr. Blenkinsop, what every one says is

always true. That is one of the foundations of society.

BLENKINSOP.

I gained my reputation by remarking once that it was possible for a penniless young man who married a very rich woman old enough to be his mother to be genuinely in love with her.

LADY SELLENGER.

I think it was a very cynical observation.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* LADY SELLENGER.] You know my nephew, don't you?

LADY SELLENGER.

How d'you do? I think we met at dear Gerald's a week or two ago.

FREDDIE.

[*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? [*To* NELLIE.] Have you quite forgotten me?

NELLIE.

Not quite!

FREDDIE.

Jolly day, isn't it?

NELLIE.

Awfully jolly.

[MRS. DOT *watches them as they shake hands.*

AUNT ELIZA.

[*To* LADY SELLENGER.] Would you like me to show you your rooms?

LADY SELLENGER.

Thanks, so much.

MRS. DOT.

Freddie, is Gerald's room ready?

FREDDIE.

Yes, I think so. I'll just go and find out.

[*He goes out.*

MRS. DOT.

I was so delighted to see the announcement in the morning's paper. I offer my very warmest congratulations.

NELLIE.

Thanks, so much.

MRS. DOT.

I've known Gerald for ages. I'm delighted to see him on the way to such a happy marriage. I couldn't have wished him to get engaged to any one nicer than you.

LADY SELLENGER.

It's all so romantic, isn't it? It ought to be an answer to a cynical creature like you to see the course of true love run so smoothly.

MRS. DOT.

[*To* GERALD.] I offer you also my best congratulations. I think you're very lucky.

GERALD.

[*Stiffly.*] Thank you, very much. I suppose I have my usual room?

MRS. DOT.

Yes.

[*He goes into the house.* LADY SELLENGER *and* NELLIE *accompany* AUNT ELIZA. MRS. DOT *is left alone with* BLENKINSOP.

James!

BLENKINSOP.

Hulloa!

MRS. DOT.

Do you love me?

BLENKINSOP.

Passionately.

MRS. DOT.

[*Stamping her foot.*] Don't be so silly.

BLENKINSOP.

You can't expect me to be so uncivil as to say no.

MRS. DOT.

But I'm perfectly serious.

BLENKINSOP.

Are you, by Jove? That alters the matter. In that case the answer is in the negative.

MRS. DOT.

And is there the least chance of your falling in love with me?

BLENKINSOP.

Not so long as I remain in full possession of my senses.

MRS. DOT.

Do you want to marry me?

BLENKINSOP.

Really you embarrass me very much.

MRS. DOT.

Don't hedge.

BLENKINSOP.

It's a little disconcerting to have a pistol put to your head in the form of a proposal of marriage.

MRS. DOT.

I'm not making you a proposal of marriage, idiot.

BLENKINSOP.

Then I should very much like to know what you are doing.

MRS. DOT.

I'm asking you a very simple and ordinary question.

BLENKINSOP.

Thank God, it's not one that women ask often.

MRS. DOT.

I never saw any one out of whom it's harder to get a straight answer.

BLENKINSOP.

You must make allowances for a pardonable agitation.

MRS. DOT.

James, do you want to marry me?

BLENKINSOP.

No, bless you!

MRS. DOT.

Are you quite sure?

BLENKINSOP.

Positive.

MRS. DOT.

Would nothing induce you to marry me?

BLENKINSOP.

Nothing.

MRS. DOT.

[*With a sigh of relief*] Then you may kiss my hand.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Doing so.*] You're not hurt?

MRS. DOT.

I'm infinitely relieved.

BLENKINSOP.

And Freddie, the dear boy, says he can read a woman at a glance.

MRS. DOT.

Now listen to me quite seriously. I want you to do something for me.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Nervously.*] We've put marriage out of the question, haven't we?

MRS. DOT.

Certainly.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Generously.*] You may ask anything else of me.

MRS. DOT.

I want you to let me make love to you.

BLENKINSOP.

My dear friend, this is very surprising.

MRS. DOT.

There are people who'd welcome the proposal with alacrity.

BLENKINSOP.

For how long?

MRS. DOT.

Only for a week.

BLENKINSOP.

You're sure it's not in earnest?

MRS. DOT.

Quite sure.

BLENKINSOP.

And what have I got to do?

MRS. DOT.

Well, you've got to look as if you liked it.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Sombrely.*] Of course, it sounds very delightful.

MRS. DOT.

You must show a coming-on disposition, you know, or I can do nothing.

BLENKINSOP.

Do you want me to make love to *you?*

MRS. DOT.

I'm afraid it's asking a great deal of you.

BLENKINSOP.

Not at all. Not at all. But I wish you'd tell me what your little game is.

MRS. DOT.

Ah, here's Aunt Eliza. The very person I wanted. [AUNT ELIZA *comes on the terrace from the house. Impulsively.*] Aunt Eliza, will you be a perfect brick? Will you do something for me, that's an awful nuisance?

AUNT ELIZA.

My dear, why on earth are you so excited? Of course I'll do anything in reason for you.

MRS. DOT.

But it's not in reason.

AUNT ELIZA.

Well, I'll do it all the same.

MRS. DOT.

I want you to take a motor and bolt up to London and get a special licence.

AUNT ELIZA.

A special licence!

BLENKINSOP.

A special licence!

MRS. DOT.

[*Catching sight of his face.*] Get two special licences. They're always useful things to have in a house.

AUNT ELIZA.

But they must be made out to certain names.

MRS. DOT.

Must they? How stupid! Well, have one made out for Frederick Perkins and Eleanor Sellenger.

AUNT ELIZA.

My dear child, you must be crazy.

MRS. DOT.

Now don't argue, but do as I tell you. If two

young things are thrown together with a certain amount of skill they always marry.

AUNT ELIZA.

But they hardly know one another.

MRS. DOT.

If people waited to know one another before they married, the world wouldn't be so grossly over-populated as it is now.

AUNT ELIZA.

You're certainly quite crazy.

MRS. DOT.

No, I'm not. I shall never get Gerald to break his word. My only chance is with Nellie.

BLENKINSOP

[*Uneasily.*] But you've told her to get two licences.

MRS. DOT.

Make the second one out in the names of James Blenkinsop and Frances Annandale Worthley.

BLENKINSOP.

I absolutely refuse.

MRS. DOT.

But you must let me. You can't leave an old friend in the lurch.

BLENKINSOP.

It's all very fine to invoke the claims of friendship, but it's carrying it rather far when you pay three guineas for a special licence.

MRS. DOT.

My dear man, I can't drag you to the altar.

BLENKINSOP.

I'm beginning to think you're capable of anything.

MRS. DOT.

But don't you see, you idiot, that I want to marry Gerald Hollington? And I'm eating my heart out.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Crossly.*] It's evidently a diet that agrees with you. You're growing fat on it.

MRS. DOT.

Don't be spiteful. I've not gained half a pound in the last five years.

AUNT ELIZA.

And how on earth are you going to get Freddie and Nellie Sellenger to use this licence?

MRS. DOT.

Never mind, leave everything to me. And make haste to get up to London.

AUNT ELIZA.

Very well, I'll go at once.

[*Just as* AUNT ELIZA *is going into the house* LADY SELLENGER *comes out, followed by* NELLIE; AUNT ELIZA *stops and listens to the conversation from the doorway.*

MRS. DOT.

I hope you've found everything you wanted.

LADY SELLENGER.

Oh, yes, thanks. I'm quite delighted with the view from my room.

MRS. DOT.

Come and sit down. I have something very serious I want to talk to you about.

LADY SELLENGER.

Dear Mr. Blenkinsop, do take Nellie for a little stroll in the garden.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, but it concerns Nellie, and I want her to hear.

BLENKINSOP.

I perceive you are inclined to think that the serious cannot fail to be improper, Lady Sellenger.

LADY SELLENGER.

Be quiet, you horrible cynic.

MRS. DOT.

Well, a most ridiculous thing has happened, and I want Nellie to help me.

NELLIE.

Me?

MRS. DOT.

My dear, it's so unfortunate, but my nephew has fallen head over ears in love with you.

NELLIE.

Nonsense!

MRS. DOT.

I can't understand it. After all, he's only seen you once, and you can't have exchanged more than a dozen words.

LADY SELLENGER.

How very annoying!

MRS. DOT.

And it's so unexpected, because he's not at all the sort of boy who falls in and out of love with every pretty girl he meets. I think you're his first passion, and he's inclined to take it very seriously.

LADY SELLENGER.

Poor boy, I can afford to sympathise with him now that Nellie is safely engaged to Gerald Hollington.

NELLIE.

It's really rather flattering, isn't it? But how on earth d'you know?

MRS. DOT.

He tells me everything. You see I've always tried to be his friend as well as his aunt. He has no secrets from me.

BLENKINSOP.

You'll tell us next that a boy who's been to Eton and Oxford has a pure and innocent mind.

MRS. DOT.

My dear child, he simply raves about you. He's been talking of nothing else ever since you met.

LADY SELLENGER.

But doesn't he know that Nellie is going to be married at the end of the season?

MRS. DOT.

Of course, he does. I've dinned it into his ears, but it seems to have no effect on him. He's the sort of lover that will hear of no obstacles. It's really quite pathetic to hear the passionate harangues that he pours into my ears.

NELLIE.

What sort of things does he say?

MRS. DOT.

My dear, I suppose very much the same as Gerald.

NELLIE.

No one could accuse Gerald of being a passionate lover.

MRS. DOT.

Really?

LADY SELLENGER.

I'm very glad he's not. He's going to be your husband, and that's more satisfactory than any amount of pretty speeches.

NELLIE.

I could wish that he talked to me of something besides the weather and the Royal Academy.

LADY SELLENGER.

My dear child, what are you saying? Gerald has a charming nature and the very highest principles.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Imitating her pompous manner.*] To say nothing of a peerage and a considerable income.

MRS. DOT.

He certainly has every advantage over poor Freddie, who is nobody in particular and hasn't a penny to bless himself with.

NELLIE.

I think he's awfully nice.

MRS. DOT.

Well, that's just what I don't want you to think. I shouldn't have said anything to you about his—mad infatuation, only I want you to be very careful.

LADY SELLENGER.

Of course. It's quite natural.

NELLIE.

What do you want me to do?

MRS. DOT.

Well, I want you to be very good and sweet and help me to cure him. I'd send him away, only it would have no effect. I thought if he saw you again he might find out that you have at least one or two faults. At present he thinks you too perfect for words.

NELLIE.

I'm not that, really.

MRS. DOT.

I didn't think you were. I want you to promise that you'll do nothing that he can in the least take as encouragement. I want you to be very distant and very cold.

NELLIE.

Of course, I'll be only too glad to do anything I can.

MRS. DOT.

You'd be doing him a real kindness if you could snub him at every opportunity. Then you must avoid him as much as you can. Of course, you'll be very much with Gerald while you're down here.

LADY SELLENGER.

Of course. The dears, they've not seen one another for a year, and they have an infinity of things to discuss.

MRS. DOT.

It'll be quite easy for you to show my poor Freddie that he's only making a prodigious fool of himself.

NELLIE.

I feel so sorry for him.

MRS. DOT.

You will do what you can, won't you?

NELLIE.

I'll make it quite plain to him at once that he mustn't care for me.

MRS. DOT.

Treat it as an impertinence that you resent.

NELLIE.

I'll do that on the first opportunity.

MRS. DOT.

I know you have the sweetest nature in the world, but if you could be really brutal to him at once, it would cure him instantly.

NELLIE.

I can be horrid when I like.

MRS. DOT.

I'm sure you can. I put infinite reliance in your tact.

LADY SELLENGER.

And now I think we really might take a little turn in the garden before tea. [*Seeing that* NELLIE, *instead of accompanying her, strolls towards the house.*] Where are you going, Nellie?

NELLIE.

[*Stopping.*] I've just remembered I must write a letter. I'll join you in five minutes.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*To* BLENKINSOP *and* MRS. DOT *who are getting up.*] Oh, don't let me disturb you, I shall enjoy wandering about and looking at the flowers by myself.

[*She goes away. Just as* NELLIE *is entering the house* FREDDIE *comes out. She gives him a glance and as she passes, drops a rose.* FREDDIE *picks it up and comes forward.*

MRS. DOT.

You monster!

FREDDIE.

What's the matter?

MRS. DOT.

Give me that flower!

FREDDIE.

I shall do nothing of the sort. I shall put it in my button-hole.

MRS. DOT.

Freddie, I've come to the conclusion that you want a holiday. I wish you to pack up your things at once and go to Brighton for a week. You're looking pale and tired. I'm sure you've been working too hard.

FREDDIE.

Oh, rot! I'm as fit as a fiddle.

MRS. DOT.

Don't you agree with me, James?

BLENKINSOP.

Certainly. I think a change of air is distinctly indicated.

FREDDIE.

But I can't go away when you've got people in the house. Besides, who's to look after your correspondence?

MRS. DOT.

My dear boy, your health is the chief thing. I should never forgive myself if you came to any harm while you were my secretary. I'll write my letters myself.

BLENKINSOP.

Besides, I shall be here, and I'll do all I can to help you.

FREDDIE.

I don't believe I'm pale.

MRS. DOT.

You only have to look at yourself.

[*She takes out a little pocket mirror and hands it to him.*

BLENKINSOP.

Let's look at your tongue. [*He puts it out.*] Tut, tut, tut.

FREDDIE.

Look here, there's something behind this.

BLENKINSOP.

You're too clever, my boy.

FREDDIE.

I see through your little game. Aunt Dot, you want to get rid of me.

MRS. DOT.

How can you be so absurd?

FREDDIE.

Now, I wonder what your reason is.

MRS. DOT.

Shall we tell him the truth?

BLENKINSOP.

Yes, perhaps you'd better. He's a very bright boy.

MRS. DOT.

Well, the fact is, Freddie, a dreadful thing has happened. Poor Nellie Sellenger is desperately in love with you.

FREDDIE.

I don't see why you should want me to go away on that account.

BLENKINSOP.

Good lord, man, don't be so self-satisfied. Aren't you surprised, aren't you dumfounded that a pretty girl should fall in love with you?

FREDDIE.

I thought it meant something when she dropped that rose.

BLENKINSOP.

Bless my stars, the dolt takes it as a matter of course.

FREDDIE.

I'm awfully flattered and all that sort of thing.

MRS. DOT.

But not exactly surprised?

FREDDIE.

It's not fair to ask a fellow a question like that.

BLENKINSOP.

At all events, you see now the necessity for depriving us for a time of your charming society.

FREDDIE.

Nothing will induce me to desert a post of danger. I'm going to face the music.

BLENKINSOP.

Don't be such an ass. It's not you we're thinking of, it's that unfortunate girl.

FREDDIE.

I don't know why you think she's unfortunate.

MRS. DOT.

But, my dear boy, she's engaged to Gerald Hollington. Don't you see how serious the whole thing is? The only chance is for you to go away. We must try and make her forget you.

FREDDIE.

I don't want to do anybody a bad turn. I wouldn't do anything to queer Gerald's pitch for worlds.

BLENKINSOP.

You must combine with us in order to save her from herself.

MRS. DOT.

There's no use in her eating her heart out for you, when she must inevitably marry Gerald.

FREDDIE.

Poor old Gerald, I told you he wasn't the sort of chap a girl would be desperately in love with.

BLENKINSOP.

The acumen you have shown does credit to your years.

FREDDIE.

Still, you know, I don't think it's wise for me to go away. Don't you think it would be rather marked? And they always say that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

BLENKINSOP.

It was a woman who invented that proverb. There's no truth in it.

MRS. DOT.

What else can you suggest? The fact remains that Nellie must be cured of this—of this passion.

FREDDIE.

My own idea is that the best thing is for me to hang on here as if I knew nothing about it. I'll take care to be very distant. I'll ignore her as much as I can.

MRS. DOT.

Will you promise to do that?

FREDDIE.

Yes, rather. I'll let her see that I'm really a deuced dissipated dog.

BLENKINSOP.

Don't let her think you're too great a devil with

the ladies, or that'll be the last straw. If there's one thing a woman likes it's a really bad man. She'll start reforming you, and then there'll be no holding her back.

MRS. DOT.

No, you must seem rather dull and stupid. Let her think you're a bit of a milksop.

[FREDDIE *looks at them suspiciously.*

FREDDIE.

Look here, you're not pulling my leg all the time, are you?

MRS. DOT.

My dear, I should never take such a liberty.

FREDDIE.

I don't believe a word of what you've told me. Why should she care for me? You've simply been humbugging me right and left.

[*For a moment* MRS. DOT *is taken aback, but she sees* LADY SELLENGER *coming through the garden with* GERALD.

MRS. DOT.

Here's Lady Sellenger. You wont accuse her of trying to make a fool of you. [LADY SELLENGER *and* GERALD *appear.*] I've just been talking to Freddie about—about your girl.

LADY SELLENGER.

Oh yes. [*To* FREDDIE.] My poor boy, you're in a very difficult position.

FREDDIE.

Then you know all about it, too?

LADY SELLENGER.

I really feel for you very much. You'll want a great deal of tact and a great deal of courage. But you must do your duty.

[*She turns aside to* BLENKINSOP.

MRS. DOT.

[*In an undertone to* FREDDIE.] Now have I been pulling your leg?

FREDDIE.

Poor girl! [*He goes into the house.*

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Looking at him as he goes.*] What a beautiful and touching thing love is.

BLENKINSOP.

You must take care, Lady Sellenger. You're growing sentimental.

LADY SELLENGER.

But I've always been as sentimental as a schoolgirl in my heart. Only, so long as Nellie's future was

unarranged, I was obliged to keep a tight hand on myself.

MRS. DOT.

Of course, Jimmie laughs; he doesn't know what love is.

LADY SELLENGER.

Have you never been loved for yourself, Mr. Blenkinsop?

BLENKINSOP.

I have, but I have always found it deuced expensive.

GERALD.

I'm afraid Blenkinsop doesn't set much store on the gentle sex.

BLENKINSOP.

Don't call them gentle. They're very much rougher than men.

MRS. DOT.

Stop him, or he'll utter a whole string of horrors.

BLENKINSOP.

Have you never watched the gentle sex fight and push and scramble as it gets into the Hammersmith bus? I assure you, the unlucky man who finds himself in that seething feminine crowd is fortunate if he escapes without losing an eye or half his teeth. And have you seen the fury of the gentle sex at a sale as they seize some worthless fragment, and the bitterness with which they haggle? The other day I was in the Army and Navy Stores, and two women were standing on the stairs, discussing their servants, so that no one could pass up and down. I took off my

hat and said: Excuse me, would you allow me to pass. They moved barely two inches, and one of them said in a loud voice to the other: What an impertinent man. The gentle sex! Yesterday I was hanging on a strap in a crowded train coming from the city, and I saw a pale-faced weary clerk give up his seat to a strong and bouncing girl. She took it without saying thank you, because she was a lady and he wasn't a gentleman. Then a tired old woman came in and stood, but the bouncing girl never thought of giving up the seat to her. The gentle sex! They have such tender hearts they couldn't bear to hurt a fly. Have you ever seen a woman get out of a bus ten yards before her destination in order to save the wretched horses another start? Not much. Have you ever known a woman of fashion who sends her maid to bed when she knows she won't be in till four in the morning? Not much. And is there anything like the insolence with which a woman treats her social inferiors of the same sex? Is it men who put on their backs the sealskins that are torn off the living bodies of helpless brutes? Is it men who put on their hats the beautiful birds of the forest? It's the gentle sex. Boys are taught manners. They are taught to take off their hats and hold open the door for their sisters. They are taught to fetch and carry for women, and to give up the front seat in life to women. But what are girls taught? Girls are taught etiquette, and that, I suppose, makes them in due course the gentle sex.

LADY SELLENGER.

Every one knows you're a horrible cynic, so there can't be a word of truth in anything you say.

BLENKINSOP.

Q.E.D.

GERALD.

Here comes Nellie.

[NELLIE *comes in, having changed her dress. She now wears a very pretty white frock, all flounces and furbelows, and a large white hat. At the same moment from the other side* FREDDIE *enters. He also has changed, and is now in spotless white.*

MRS. DOT.

[*With a laugh, whispering to* BLENKINSOP.] They've both changed their clothes.

GERALD.

Would you like to come for a row, Nellie?

NELLIE.

I'm too tired. Won't you go with Mrs. Dot? I'll rest here till tea-time.

[NELLIE *sits down, and the others go.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Personally, I must walk. I sacrifice all my inclinations to my fear of growing too stout. I often wonder if we shall get our good dinners in heaven that we've done without on earth.

BLENKINSOP.

It's generally understood that we shall only get our deserts.

[NELLIE *watches them go from over her shoulder. She sees that* FREDDIE *is hanging back. She smiles and elaborately disregards him. He comes forward and leans over her chair.*

NELLIE.

Aren't you going with the others?

FREDDIE.

Do you mind if I stay with you?

NELLIE.

I like it.

FREDDIE.

Jolly here, isn't it?

NELLIE.

Awfully jolly.

FREDDIE.

I've not congratulated you on your engagement yet.

NELLIE.

I didn't expect you would.

FREDDIE.

Why?

NELLIE.

Oh, I don't know.

FREDDIE.

It seems a long time since we first met, doesn't it?

NELLIE.

Why?

FREDDIE.

Because I seem to know you so well.

NELLIE.

You're very easy to get to know, aren't you?

FREDDIE.

I say, you look just like another rose in this garden.

NELLIE.

I suppose you say that to every girl who sits here?

FREDDIE.

I've never said it to any one but you.

NELLIE.

They tell me you're very impressionable.

FREDDIE.

They lie.

NELLIE.

I think I shall take off my hat.

FREDDIE.

Yes, do.

[*She proceeds to do so. She pretends that she cannot.*

NELLIE.

Oh, how stupid of me! Something has caught.

FREDDIE.

May I help you?

NELLIE.

I'm afraid I'm giving you a lot of trouble.

[*He helps her, and she gives a little scream.*

FREDDIE.

Oh, I'm so sorry. Did I hurt you?

NELLIE.

No, but it tickled.

[*She takes off the hat. One hand of hers remains in his. Their eyes meet for the first time, and they smile.*

FREDDIE.

I say, what a pretty hand you have! It looks so white on mine, doesn't it?

[MRS. DOT *creeps back and stands behind a bush, so that she cannot be seen.*

NELLIE.

I rather like your hand. It's so strong and brown.

FREDDIE.

You know, you're awfully easy to get on with. Sometimes I feel dreadfully shy and nervous with women, but I can think of all sorts of things I want to say to you.

NELLIE.

I seem to have known you all my life.

FREDDIE.

[*Impulsively.*] Isn't it jolly here?

NELLIE.

Awfully jolly.

[*He looks at her for a moment.*

FREDDIE.

I want to ask you something. You won't be angry, will you?

NELLIE.

No.

FREDDIE.

May I kiss you?

NELLIE.

No.

FREDDIE.

It's awfully unkind of you.

NELLIE.

You shouldn't have asked.

FREDDIE.

Shouldn't I? I wanted to, badly.

NELLIE.

There are some things one should do without asking.

FREDDIE.

You are a brick.

[*He kisses her. As he does so,* HOLLINGTON *comes in and sees them. He stops for a moment in astonishment, then withdraws.*

FREDDIE.

Let's go on the river, shall we?

NELLIE.

I told Gerald I was too tired.

FREDDIE.

Oh, hang Gerald!

NELLIE.

We might go and play the piano in the drawing-room.

FREDDIE.

I'm awfully fond of music. Cake-walks, and things like that, you know.

[*They get up.* MRS. DOT *comes forward.*

MRS. DOT.

Are you going? I thought you were tired.

NELLIE.

We're just going to look at the kitchen garden.

FREDDIE.

I've told Miss Sellenger that you've got some most awfully good carrots.

MRS. DOT.

[*As they go to the house.*] That's not the way, you know.

NELLIE.

[*Coolly.*] I'm only just going to get a handkerchief.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, I see. I beg your pardon.

[*They go.* GERALD *comes forward. He is rather grave and solemn.*

MRS. DOT.

What a picture they make, don't they? I can't tell you how much I like Nellie.

GERALD.

You've come to the conclusion that the cut of her skirt's all right.

MRS DOT.

Ah, you mustn't recall what I said when I was in a temper. You know, I'm rather touched by her obvious affection for you.

GERALD.

It's very good of you to say so.

MRS. DOT.

It's so nice to see two people head over ears in love with one another.

GERALD.

I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to think Nellie was so much in love with me as all that.

MRS. DOT.

My dear boy, I've just had proof of it.

GERALD.

Have you? That's more than I have.

MRS. DOT.

And is dear Lady Sellenger going to live with you when you're married?

GERALD.

Look here, Dot, what's the meaning of all this?

MRS. DOT.

[*Much surprised.*] Of what?

GERALD.

Why did you ask us all down?

MRS. DOT.

Because I'm of a hospitable turn of mind. Didn't you want to come? I'm so sorry.

GERALD.

You've utterly ignored me since I arrived.

MRS. DOT.

[*Ironically.*] Much as I should have liked to devote myself exclusively to your entertainment, I've been really obliged to remember that my other guests had equal claims upon me.

GERALD.

I should very much like to take you by the shoulders and give you a good shaking.

MRS. DOT.

I don't think you're in a very good temper to-day.

GERALD.

[*Crossly.*] Pardon me, I'm in the best possible temper.

MRS. DOT.

You certainly ought to be with the prospect of spending a week in almost uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with the object of your affections.

GERALD.

I can't make you out. You're so changed since last we met.

MRS. DOT.

You see, last time I thought I was in love with you. Now I know I'm not.

GERALD.

[*Bitterly.*] I'm glad you've got over it so quickly.

MRS. DOT.

Really, you couldn't wish me to continue eating my heart out for a young man, however charming, who is going to marry somebody else.

GERALD.

Of course not.

MRS. DOT.

[*Mockingly.*] Well?

GERALD.

I was a fool to think you ever cared at all.

MRS. DOT.

But why should you think it when you took the greatest pains to assure me that you didn't care two straws for me?

GERALD.

[*Quickly.*] I didn't!

MRS. DOT.

You did!

GERALD.

I didn't!

MRS. DOT.

Then you did care for me?

GERALD.

I never said that.

MRS. DOT.

Anyhow, whatever your sentiments were, it would gratify your self-esteem to think that I was languishing with a hopeless passion.

GERALD.

It's cruel of you to laugh at me.

MRS. DOT.

By the way, are you by any chance in love with me now?

GERALD.

You have no right to ask me that question.

MRS. DOT.

My dear boy, I'm not keeping you from spending an idyllic afternoon with Nellie. You've forced this conversation upon me. I assure you it's most distasteful.

GERALD.

If I had married you, I should certainly have beaten you with a big stick.

MRS. DOT.

What do you think is my chief characteristic?

GERALD.

That's a question I *can* answer. The most confounded and aggravating unreasonableness that I ever saw.

MRS. DOT.

Nonsense. It's obvious that my chief characteristic is a sweet and yielding nature. But as there's no likelihood of our agreeing on that, what do you think is the second?

GERALD.

Obstinacy.

MRS. DOT.

Well, I prefer to call it strength of mind. Now, I'll acknowledge that I was in love with you—a month ago. That's a feather in your cap.

GERALD.

Oh, I wish we were back again. I've had such rotten luck.

MRS. DOT.

But when I saw that my sweetness was likely to be wasted on the desert air, I made up my mind to cure myself. First I cried for two days.

GERALD.

Dot.

MRS. DOT.

No, don't sympathise. I have rather a high colour, and when I've had a good cry it always improves my complexion. After that, I ordered some new frocks, and I bought a diamond necklace that I'd been hankering after for some time.

GERALD.

And that thoroughly consoled you, I suppose?

MRS. DOT.

It helped. Then I came to the conclusion that there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. I thought you over. After all, you're not really very good-looking, are you?

GERALD.

I'm not aware that I ever made any pretence of being so.

MRS. DOT.

And I'm sure no one could accuse you of being extremely amusing.

GERALD.

I have no doubt I'm excessively dull.

MRS. DOT.

I couldn't help seeing that you'd suit Nellie much better than you would have suited me. She has that comfortable stupidity which the average Englishman looks upon as the highest recommendation for a wife.

GERALD.

It's charming of you to say so.

MRS. DOT,

She *is* a little dull, isn't she?

GERALD.

I don't think her so.

MRS. DOT.

Doesn't time hang rather heavily on your hands now and then? Isn't it difficult to find topics of conversation?

GERALD.

I don't find it so.

MRS. DOT.

Ah—she does.

GERALD.

And the long and short of it is that the emotion which you dignify with the name of love, had entirely disappeared after a week.

MRS. DOT.

Make it ten days to be on the safe side.

GERALD.

I congratulate you.

MRS. DOT.

You wouldn't have it otherwise, surely?

GERALD.

Of course not.

MRS. DOT.

Then all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

GERALD.

[*Furiously.*] I think you must be quite heartless.

MRS. DOT.

[*Delighted.*] Ah, that's what I said to you a month ago. Philippine.

GERALD.

Now, perhaps, you'd like to know what my feeling is towards you?

MRS. DOT.

No, I'm quite indifferent, thanks!

GERALD.

Well, I shall tell you for all that. It's a joke to you, and you can afford to laugh at it.

[*He goes up to her and then stops suddenly.*

MRS. DOT.

Well?

GERALD.

Nothing.

MRS. DOT.

Oh! My poor heart went pit-a-pat. I thought you were going to kiss me.

GERALD.

I hate you And I wish I'd never set eyes on you.

[*He turns on his heel and walks out quickly. As soon as he is gone* MRS. DOT *begins to dance a break-down. She cocks a snook after him.*

MRS. DOT.

I'll marry you yet, you beast, I'll marry you yet.

[BLENKINSOP *comes in.*

BLENKINSOP.

What on earth is the matter with you now?

[*From inside is heard the sound of a cake-walk.*

MRS. DOT.

Come on. [*She seizes him and begins to dance.*

BLENKINSOP.

Unhand me, woman!

MRS. DOT.

Oh, you dear, you dear, you dear.

[*She flings both arms round his neck and kisses him soundly. At this moment* GERALD *returns.*

GERALD.

I beg your pardon. I forgot my hat.

[*He takes it and goes out stiffly.* MRS. DOT *bursts into a shriek of laughter.*

BLENKINSOP.

That's all very fine. But what about my character?

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

A hall in MRS. WORTHLEY'S *house on the River.*
GERALD *and* NELLIE *are seated in arm-chairs. She stifles a yawn. Then he yawns.*

GERALD.

I beg your pardon.

NELLIE.

[*Yawning.*] I never saw any one who yawned so much as you.

GERALD.

[*Ironically.*] I suppose you've never looked at yourself in the glass?

NELLIE.

Is your family very long-lived, Gerald?

GERALD.

[*Rather surprised.*] Are you already asking yourself how you'll look in widow's weeds?

NELLIE.

You may very well live for forty years, mayn't you?

GERALD.

My maternal grandfather survived to plague his descendants to the ripe age of ninety-seven.

NELLIE.

How many days are there in forty years?

GERALD.

I should think about fifteen thousand.

NELLIE.

Has it occurred to you that we may eat fifteen thousand breakfasts sitting opposite one another, and fifteen thousand luncheons, and fifteen thousand dinners?

GERALD.

[*Gloomily.*] Yes, it had occurred to me.

NELLIE.

And how do you look upon the prospect?

GERALD.

[*Grimly.*] It fills me with satisfaction, naturally.

NELLIE.

[*Abruptly.*] I suppose you're very much in love with me?

GERALD.

What an extraordinary question!

NELLIE.

I don't think any one but a lunatic would describe you as an ardent lover.

GERALD.

[*Coldly.*] I regret that my behaviour doesn't meet with your satisfaction.

NELLIE.

Do you know that since we became definitely engaged you've never told me that you cared for me?

GERALD.

[*Apologetically.*] Yes, I ought to have done that, oughtn't I? I suppose I thought you'd take it for granted.

NELLIE.

Every girl likes a suspicion of romance thrown over her love-affairs.

GERALD.

Your mother will tell you that the certainty of marriage is much more satisfactory.

NELLIE.

[*Dryly.*] You would have made an excellent husband —for mother.

GERALD.

Have you noticed that when we *do* think of something to talk about, we get perilously near a squabble?

NELLIE.

I sometimes think it would be better to quarrel outright now and then than be always so desperately polite to one another.

GERALD.

I'm afraid I have an admirable temper.

NELLIE.

Mother always says you have all the virtues.

GERALD.

Shall we look at the *Sketch* together?

NELLIE.

We've looked at the *Sketch* together three times. [*Following his eye, which goes to other illustrated papers on the table.*] And the *Illustrated*, and the *Sphere*, and the *Graphic*.

GERALD.

Then what would you like to do?

NELLIE.

I should like to SCREAM.

GERALD.

Would you, by George? So would I.

NELLIE.

Oh, Gerald, let's have a good scream together.

Enter LADY SELLENGER *and* MRS. DOT.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*With a bland smile.*] What a picture they make!

MRS. DOT.

[*Acidly.*] It's quite charming to see two young things so engrossed in one another's society.

LADY SELLENGER.

Now, you really mustn't waste this beautiful afternoon. You must go and have a nice long walk together.

NELLIE.

We had a nice long walk this morning.

MRS. DOT.

[*Sweetly*] Then why don't you go on the river? You can take your tea with you and spend the whole afternoon there.

GERALD.

We spent the whole afternoon on the river yesterday, and you kindly gave us our tea to take with us.

LADY SELLENGER.

It reminds me of the happy days when I was engaged to your poor father, Nellie. We were just like you and Gerald. We couldn't bear to be out of one another's sight. Now, run and get your hat, darling.

NELLIE.

Oh, mamma, I've got the most dreadful headache that I've ever had in my life, and I must really go and lie down.

LADY SELLENGER.

Nonsense. An afternoon in the fresh air with Gerald is just the thing to put you right.

GERALD.

I'm so sorry, but I have some very important letters to write. I *must* catch the post.

MRS. DOT.

[*Sweetly.*] You'll have lots of time when you come in. The post doesn't go till after dinner.

LADY SELLENGER.

If you make excuses like that, poor Nellie will think she bores you already.

GERALD.

In that case I shall be only too glad to go on the river.

MRS. DOT.

Take my sunshade, darling. You won't want a hat.

NELLIE.

[*Savagely.*] Thank you, dear.

[NELLIE *and* GERALD *go out gloomily.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Just like humming-birds, aren't they?

MRS. DOT.

Do you mean turtle-doves by any chance?

LADY SELLENGER.

I was never very good at natural history. . . . Dear Mrs. Worthley, I must really thank you for the tact with which you've thrown Gerald and Nellie in one another's society every moment of the day.

MRS. DOT.

I can flatter myself that *they've* thoroughly enjoyed their week here.

[AUNT ELIZA *comes in with* BLENKINSOP.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*With a look of intelligence.*] Dear Mr. Blenkinsop, you wicked, wicked cynic. [*Meaningly.*] I shall go and lie down. Are you coming upstairs, Miss MacGregor?

AUNT ELIZA.

In one minute.

LADY SELLENGER.

I want to have a little talk with you. [*As* BLENKINSOP *holds open the door for her, in a whisper.*] Aren't I tactful?

[LADY SELLENGER *goes out.*

BLENKINSOP.

What villainy is that old woman up to now?

MRS. DOT.

You idiot! Don't you see that she's discovered the passion that devours our hearts—your manly bosom and my timid, fluttering heart—and she wants to leave us alone.

BLENKINSOP.

I'm beginning to feel very unwell.

MRS. DOT.

[*Archly.*] Wouldn't you be rather flattered if I really were in love with you?

BLENKINSOP.

[*Alarmed.*] Dot, don't make these horrible suggestions. You make my flesh creep.

MRS. DOT.

But you've been so cold, you haven't given me a chance.

BLENKINSOP.

Cold! Heaven knows what would have happened if I'd given you any encouragement. I've never been able to take my eyes off the ground without finding yours fixed on me with the languishing expression of a dying duck in a thunderstorm. I've never been able to go near you without your stroking me as if I were a velvet cushion or a Persian cat. I've not eaten a single meal in peace in case you suddenly took it into your head to press my foot under the table.

MRS. DOT.

What would you have done if I had?

BLENKINSOP.

[*With outraged dignity.*] I should have screamed! And the thought of that special licence has cast a chill in my heart. I don't know what it's all coming to. You are my witness, Miss MacGregor, that I won't marry her, however deeply she compromises me.

AUNT ELIZA.

[*Smiling.*] I am your witness.

BLENKINSOP.

She shan't make an honest man of me.

[MRS. DOT *takes from a drawer of the escritoire one of the licences.*

MRS. DOT.

[*Smiling.*] Frances Annandale Worthley—James Blenkinsop.

BLENKINSOP.

I feel as though some one were walking over my grave.

AUNT ELIZA.

But how on earth are you going to get Nellie Sellinger and Freddie to use the other licence?

MRS. DOT.

When the right moment comes I shall leave it under their noses, and allow them to draw what con-

sequences they choose. . . . If any woman ever earned a husband, I have. I've taken every opportunity to snub Gerald till he can hardly contain himself with rage. I've thrown him in Nellie's company till they're both so bored they could almost cry. I've been constantly on the watch to prevent Nellie and Freddie from having two minutes by themselves till they can hardly bear the sight of me. And I've made love to you with a persistence that would have melted the heart of a fish. If I fail, it will be your fault.

BLENKINSOP.

But what on earth do you want me to do?

MRS. DOT.

Good heavens, throw a little passion into your behaviour. Look at me as though you'd never seen any one so ravishing in your life. When you take my hand, hold it as if you would never let it go.

[*She takes his hand.*

BLENKINSOP.

Remember, there's no one but Miss MacGregor present.

MRS. DOT.

[*With a yearning glance.*] Look into my eyes like this.

BLENKINSOP.

Don't. You make me feel very uncomfortable.

MRS. DOT.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh, you're too stupid. You're a

stock and a stone. You're an owl. You're a ridiculous idiot.

BLENKINSOP.

Temper, temper.

MRS. DOT.

You'll ruin my whole life, because you're such a perfect fool that you can't make love to a woman.

[*She breaks away from him and begins to cry. He walks up and down, then looks at her with a smile. He makes a sign to* MISS MACGREGOR *that* MRS. DOT *cannot see.*

BLENKINSOP.

[*In a different voice.*] Dot, this little game of ours has lasted long enough.

MRS. DOT.

[*Sobbing in her handkerchief.*] Yes, it has. I'm sick to death of the whole thing.

BLENKINSOP.

You asked me to play a part, and you didn't know that it might be deadly earnest.

MRS. DOT.

Fiddlesticks!

BLENKINSOP.

I have a secret that I can no longer keep from you.

MRS. DOT.

Well, tell it to the horse-marines.

BLENKINSOP.

Dot, I love you !

MRS. DOT.

Oh, don't be so silly.

BLENKINSOP.

But I tell you I'm not joking.

MRS. DOT.

Thank heaven for that. I'm weary of your bad jokes.

BLENKINSOP.

The thing started as a bad joke, but it has ended in something very different. A change has come over me, and I'm ashamed.

MRS. DOT.

[*Looking up.*] Eh ?

BLENKINSOP.

Don't you see that I'm a different man ? Dot, it's you who've changed me.

MRS. DOT.

I really believe he's waking up.

BLENKINSOP.

If I was shy and awkward, it's because I wouldn't give in to myself. I was overwhelmed. I couldn't understand.

MRS. DOT.

That's much better. There really is a ring of emotion in your voice.

BLENKINSOP.

How shouldn't there be, when I'm saying at last what has trembled on the tip of my tongue for ten days?

MRS. DOT.

[*Delighted.*] There! That's just the tone I want. Talk with that quiver in your voice when you ask me to pass you the mustard at dinner.

BLENKINSOP.

I lie awake at night thinking of you, and when I fall asleep I seem to hold you in my arms.

MRS. DOT.

That's splendid. Why couldn't you say all this before?

BLENKINSOP.

Dot, Dot, don't torture me. Don't you see I mean it.

MRS. DOT.

What!

BLENKINSOP.

I'm not jesting now. I wish to heaven I were.

MRS. DOT.

[*Forcing a laugh.*] My dear James, you're really piling it on too much.

BLENKINSOP.

You must be mad or blind. Can't you feel that I love you?

MRS. DOT.

Don't be so absurd. You know you're only—you're only pulling my leg.

BLENKINSOP.

Oh, I've been a perfect ass. I should never have consented to play this ghastly trick. If you only knew what tortures I've suffered!

MRS. DOT.

He isn't really serious, Aunt Eliza?

AUNT ELIZA.

[*Smiling.*] Upon my word, it looks very much like it.

BLENKINSOP.

What did you expect? You've played on my heart-strings as though they were an instrument that had no feeling. You've put a caress into every tone of your voice.

MRS. DOT.

[*Ruefully.*] Of course, I am fascinating. I can't deny that.

BLENKINSOP.

When you touched my hand, every nerve of my body thrilled.

MRS. DOT.

You're not really in love with me?

BLENKINSOP.

Passionately.

MRS. DOT.

You're ridiculous, James Blenkinsop.

BLENKINSOP.

I was a fool. I played with fire, and I never dreamed I'd burn myself.

MRS. DOT.

But you mustn't be in love with me. I won't hear of it.

BLENKINSOP.

It's too late to say that now. I adore you.

MRS. DOT.

But what on earth's to be done?

BLENKINSOP.

You must marry me.

MRS. DOT.

Nothing will induce me to do anything of the sort.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Going up to her with outstretched arms.*] You can't realise the wealth of tenderness and affection which I'll lavish upon you.

MRS. DOT.

Go away! Don't come near me.

BLENKINSOP.

Why should you care for Gerald? Do you think if he loved you, he would let a trifling engagement with somebody else stand in the way?

MRS. DOT.

The fact is that men are never to be trusted.

BLENKINSOP.

I can't live without you now. I'll give up my whole life to make you happy.

MRS. DOT.

But I'm in love with Gerald. I'm not in love with you. I shall never be in love with you.

BLENKINSOP.

You owe me something for all the agony you've made me endure. Dot, remember that licence. It was bought in jest, but the Archbishop of Canterbury was in earnest.

MRS. DOT.

But my dear James, for heaven's sake be reasonable. You know just as well as I do that you're not a marrying man.

BLENKINSOP.

Give me the chance, and you'll see.

MRS. DOT.

I'm sure you wouldn't like me. I'm horrid really.

BLENKINSOP.

I know that you're full of faults, but, bless you, I love them all

MRS. DOT.

I've got a beastly temper.

BLENKINSOP.

I dote upon you when I see your eyes flash with anger.

MRS. DOT.

I'm awfully extravagant, and if the Government brings in temperance legislation I shall be ruined.

BLENKINSOP.

I'm rich. I should look upon it as the greatest happiness to spend my last penny to gratify your smallest wish.

MRS. DOT.

I won't marry you. I won't marry you. I won't!

BLENKINSOP.

Dot, Dot!

[*He catches her in his arms and kisses her At this moment* GERALD *comes in.* MRS. DOT *breaks away from* BLENKINSOP. *There is an awkward pause.*

MRS. DOT.

[*To* GERALD.] I thought you were on the river.

GERALD.

Hang the river!

[*She goes to the door, which* BLENKINSOP *opens for her. She goes out. As* AUNT ELIZA *follows, he speaks to her in a low tone.*

BLENKINSOP.

There's passion for you.

AUNT ELIZA.

You brutes, you can all do it. You positively made my heart beat. [*She goes out.*

GERALD.

What did Miss MacGregor say?

BLENKINSOP.

A vague suggestion of bigamy if I understood correctly.

GERALD.

[*Frigidly.*] I'm afraid I came at an inopportune moment.

BLENKINSOP.

It appears to be one of your happy little ways.

GERALD.

Every one seems to kiss every one else in this house.

BLENKINSOP.

[*With effrontery.*] You have only to envelop Lady Sellenger in your arms, and the picture will be complete.

GERALD.

Would you kindly explain this incident?

BLENKINSOP.

If you'll allow me to say so, I really can't see that it's any business of yours.

GERALD.

[*Hotly.*] Look here, Blenkinsop, you've got no right to play your fool-tricks with Mrs. Dot. She's a very excitable and thoughtless woman. She's . .

BLENKINSOP.

Well?

GERALD.

Oh, damn you!

BLENKINSOP.

Not at all, not at all.

GERALD.

[*Angrily.*] What the deuce is the meaning of all this tomfoolery?

BLENKINSOP.

[*Blandly.*] I suppose you couldn't be a little more civil, could you?

GERALD.

Look here, Blenkinsop, the best thing you can do is to receive a telegram that requires your immediate presence in town.

BLENKINSOP.

Thanks very much, but I'm extremely comfortable down here.

GERALD.

You'd be rather surprised if I threw you out of the window, wouldn't you?

BLENKINSOP.

I should not only be surprised, but I should look upon it as an odious familiarity.

GERALD.

Would you like to know my private opinion of you?

BLENKINSOP.

Spare me my blushes, dear boy. It always embarrasses me to be flattered to my face.

GERALD.

You silly old fool.

BLENKINSOP.

I believe you're considerably annoyed.

GERALD.

Not in the least. What the dickens is there about you that should annoy me?

BLENKINSOP.

Now that I come to think of it, you are certainly in a passion. Your face is red, your attire is disordered, and you have a slight squint in your eye.

GERALD.

My dear fellow, if I hadn't the best temper in the world, I should kick you.

BLENKINSOP.

You'd far better go and lie down. You'll only say something which you'll regret.

GERALD.

I suppose you're not for a moment under the impression that Mrs. Dot cares twopence about you.

BLENKINSOP.

May I ask how that can in the least concern you?

GERALD.

Mrs. Dot is an old friend of mine. I'm not going to see her made ridiculous by a conceited nincompoop.

BLENKINSOP.

By the way, has it slipped your memory that you're engaged to Miss Sellenger?

GERALD.

Good Lord, no!

BLENKINSOP.

I daresay you wish it had.

GERALD.

That's a confounded impertinent thing to say.

BLENKINSOP.

My dear fellow, I never saw any one with less common sense in my life. Surely it's not very extraordinary that the same tender passion which inflames the chaste breasts of yourself and Miss Sellenger, should attack the equally chaste breasts of myself and Mrs. Worthley.

GERALD.

Don't talk such twaddle.

BLENKINSOP.

I suppose you'd be considerably astonished if I told you that I'd just asked Mrs. Dot to be my wife.

GERALD.

She must have screamed with laughter.

BLENKINSOP.

You noticed her unconcealed hilarity when you came in.

GERALD.

[*Going up to him quickly.*] You don't mean it!

BLENKINSOP.

No man is quite safe from the toils of women till he's safely in his grave. And even then a feminine worm probably makes a dead set at him.

GERALD.

And does Mrs. Dot—reciprocate your affection?

BLENKINSOP.

Really you ask me a very delicate question.

GERALD.

By the great Harry, the man thinks she's in love with him.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Rather indignant.*] And pray, why shouldn't she be just as much in love with me as with you?

GERALD.

[*With a burst of laughter.*] Ha, ha, ha.

BLENKINSOP.

What the blazes are you laughing at?

GERALD.

Ha! ha! ha!

BLENKINSOP.

Shut up, you blithering idiot!

GERALD.

[*Still laughing.*] She *has* made a fool of you. Ha! ha! ha! [*Seriously.*] And did you really think any woman would care for you? My poor Blenkinsop! My poor, poor Blenkinsop!

BLENKINSOP.

You're a jackanapes, sir, you're an impudent jackanapes. And why not, pray?

GERALD.

[*Furiously.*] Because you're revolting to look upon, and your conversation is inexpressibly tedious.

BLENKINSOP.

It's charming of you to say so.

GERALD.

If you want to marry any one, marry Lady Sellenger.

BLENKINSOP.

You are evidently under the impression that if a woman can't be so fortunate as to marry you, she had far better retire into a nunnery.

GERALD.

You're a cantankerous cynic and a fatuous donkey.

BLENKINSOP.

I like the delicacy with which you express your appreciation of my merits.

GERALD.

Listen to me, Blenkinsop! Clear out of the house before you make a greater mess of things than you have already. Mrs. Dot would as soon marry her groom as marry you.

BLENKINSOP.

You think it's quite impossible that she should ever have dreamt of such a thing?

GERALD.

Not only impossible, but grotesque.

[BLENKINSOP *goes to the drawer in which is the licence and takes it out.*

BLENKINSOP.

Perhaps, then, it would interest you to inspect this document.

[GERALD *takes it and looks at it, dumfounded.*

GERALD.

It's a special licence.

BLENKINSOP.

So much less bother than banns, you know.

GERALD.

James Blenkinsop.

BLENKINSOP.

And Frances Annandale Worthley.

GERALD.

It's a mistake! It's all a preposterous mistake.

BLENKINSOP.

You see, the Archbishop of Canterbury calls me his right well-beloved brother. Friendly, isn't it?

[GERALD *violently tears it in pieces and flings them on the ground.* BLENKINSOP *gives a sigh of relief.* GERALD *stalks out of the room into the garden.* BLENKINSOP *goes to the door and waves his hand at him.* MRS. DOT *comes in. She has discovered that* BLENKINSOP *has been making a fool of her.*

BLENKINSOP.

He's torn up your precious licence.

MRS. DOT.

[*Quickly.*] Which one?

BLENKINSOP.

Ours, of course Three guineas gone bang, my dear.

MRS. DOT.

[*Counting on her fingers.*] I'm reckoning how many bottles of beer the British public will have to drink for us to buy another.

BLENKINSOP

But your refusal of my hand will happily prevent you from going to that expense. Thereby considerably forwarding the cause of temperance.

MRS DOT

[*With an assumption of overwhelming gravity.*]

James, I have been thinking over all you said, and I am willing to marry you.

BLENKINSOP.

[*A chill going down his spine.*] I thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I cannot accept this sacrifice.

MRS. DOT.

It is no sacrifice when I think that I can make you happy.

BLENKINSOP.

But you mustn't think of me. It's your happiness that we have to consider. Don't let a momentary impulse ruin your whole life.

MRS. DOT.

I've thought it over very carefully. I cannot resist your passionate pleading.

BLENKINSOP.

I will not be outdone in generosity. You have refused me. I accept your refusal as final.

MRS. DOT.

I never realised that your nature was so great and tender. Every word you say makes me more determined to devote my life to your happiness.

BLENKINSOP.

My dear Dot, much as I appreciate the beauty of your sentiments, I must confess that I could never marry a woman who did not love me.

MRS. DOT.

[*As though she were struggling with her modesty.*] I see that you want to force from me the avowal that is so hard to make. Oh, you men!

BLENKINSOP.

Good God, you don't mean to say you're in love with me?

MRS. DOT.

[*Languishing.*] James. Is it so very wonderful?

BLENKINSOP.

Half an hour ago you said you couldn't stand me at any price.

MRS. DOT.

It's a woman's privilege to change her mind. The passion which you threw into your proposal has completely changed me. I am touched by the vehemence with which you flung your heart at my feet. I have struggled, but I cannot resist. Take me in your arms, James, and never let me go.

BLENKINSOP.

Dot, I have a confession to make to you. I didn't mean a word I said.

MRS. DOT.

Ah, James, do not jest.

BLENKINSOP.

I assure you I'm perfectly serious. You taunted

me that I couldn't make love, so I just let myself go to show you I could. I daresay it was a silly joke, but it certainly was a joke.

MRS. DOT.

[*Unmoved.*] James, every word you say increases my admiration for you. I can't think now how I was ever blind to your great affection.

BLENKINSOP.

But don't you hear what I say?

MRS. DOT.

Do you think you can take me in so easily?

BLENKINSOP.

You don't believe me?

MRS. DOT.

Not a word.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Thoroughly alarmed.*] Now, look here. I don't love you, I've never loved you, and I never shall love you. I can't put it any clearer than that.

MRS. DOT.

[*With rapture.*] God, how he adores me!

BLENKINSOP.

I say, look here, this is a bit too thick.

MRS. DOT.

I know you only say these cruel things because you think I should be throwing myself away on you.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Huffily.*] I don't know about that.

MRS. DOT.

You cannot bear to think that I should accept you from pity. But it isn't that, James. You are handsome and noble and chivalrous. How shouldn't a woman love you?

BLENKINSOP.

I repeat that I do not reciprocate your passion.

MRS. DOT.

You can't deceive me so easily as that, James. I *know* you love me. We women have such quick intuitions.

BLENKINSOP.

So you always say.

MRS. DOT.

I see you simply quivering with restrained emotion. Oh, James, James, you've made me so happy.

[*She flings herself on his bosom and pretends to burst into tears.*

BLENKINSOP.

I say, take care. Supposing somebody saw us.

MRS. DOT.

I should like all the world to see us.

BLENKINSOP.

But it's devilish compromising.

MRS. DOT.

I want to compromise myself. Only thus can I make you certain of my love. Oh, think of the many happy years we shall spend in one another's arms, James.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Extricating himself from her embrace.*] Is there nothing I can say to undeceive you?

MRS. DOT.

Nothing! I am yours till death.

BLENKINSOP.

I will never give way to my sense of humour again.

MRS. DOT.

[*Archly.*] Do you mind if I leave you just for one minute? After so much agitation I must really go and powder my nose.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Ironically.*] Pray don't let me detain you.

MRS. DOT.

Remember I am yours till death.

BLENKINSOP.

It is very good of you to say so.

[*She goes out. He rings the bell impatiently.* THE BUTLER *comes in.*

BLENKINSOP.

Tell my servant I want him.

[THE BUTLER *goes out.* BLENKINSOP *walks up and down, wringing his hands.* THE SERVANT *enters.*

George, pack up my things at once and get the motor. There's not a moment to lose.

GEORGE.

Are you going away, sir?

BLENKINSOP.

[*Flying into a passion.*] You blithering fool, do you suppose I should want my things packed if I were staying? I'm going abroad to-night.

GEORGE.

Very well, sir.

BLENKINSOP.

You must take the train and go to Cook's at once and get some tickets.

GEORGE.

Very well, sir. Where to, sir?

BLENKINSOP.

Don't argue, sir, but do as I tell you.

GEORGE.

I must know where to get the tickets for, sir.

BLENKINSOP.

Oh, what it is to have a fool for a servant! Take a month's notice. I dismiss you. Where to, sir? Anywhere, sir? Somewhere that's a damned long way off. South Africa! I'll go and shoot lions in Uganda. And if there isn't a boat sailing at once, I'll go to America and shoot grizzlies in the Rocky Mountains.

GEORGE.

Very dangerous climate, sir.

BLENKINSOP.

Dangerous climate, sir? I would have you know it's not half such a dangerous climate as the valley of the Thames.

GEORGE.

Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.* MRS. DOT *comes in. At the sight of her* BLENKINSOP *at once cools down.*

MRS. DOT.

James, dear, did I hear you give orders for your things to be packed up?

BLENKINSOP.

[*Calmly.*] No, my love. What could have put such an idea in your head?

MRS. DOT.

You wouldn't leave me—darling?

BLENKINSOP.

My angel, nothing now shall tear me from your side.

MRS. DOT.

Dearest!

BLENKINSOP.

[*Trying to restrain himself.*] Pet!

[*He goes into the garden.* MRS. DOT *begins to laugh.* FREDDIE *comes in, with letters in his hand.*

FREDDIE.

I say, I wish you'd just have a look at these letters.

MRS. DOT.

Oh, yes. I want to have a little talk with you, Freddie. [*She takes one of the letters and reads.*] "I am directed by Mrs. Worthley to congratulate you on the recent addition to your family, but to express her regret that she cannot accede to your request." How brutal you are, Freddie! Surely Mrs. Murphy is an old friend.

FREDDIE.

I looked her out in my note-book. Six months ago we sent her fifteen pounds because she had nine children. Now she has eleven.

MRS. DOT.

And yet they complain that the birth-rate is falling. I think we'd better send her five pounds.

FREDDIE.

You really can't encourage a woman who has twins twice a year, when her husband is not only bed-ridden but a hopeless lunatic.

MRS. DOT.

Perhaps she *is* a little prolific.

FREDDIE.

Here is my answer to Mrs. MacTavish, who wants help to bury a husband.

MRS. DOT.

Poor thing! You'd better send her ten pounds.

FREDDIE.

I've answered: "Madam, I regret to see that this is the third time you have lost your husband within two years. The mortality among the unhappy gentlemen on whom you bestow your hand is so great that I can only recommend you in future to remain a widow. Yours faithfully, Frederick Perkins."

MRS. DOT.

[*Reading a letter which he hands to her.*] "I am pleased to hear that the wooden leg for which Mrs. Worthley paid for last year has proved satisfactory, but I cannot recommend her to provide you with

another. To lose one leg in a railway accident is a misfortune, but to lose a second in a colliery explosion points to carelessness." That's not original, Freddie.

FREDDIE.

I'm so hard up, I can only afford to make other people's jokes.

MRS. DOT.

[*With a shrewd look at him.*] Freddie, I've been exceedingly pleased with your behaviour during the last week. I've watched you carefully, and I'm glad to see that you've done all that was possible to destroy poor Nellie's affection for you.

FREDDIE.

[*Gravely.*] I've tried to do my duty.

MRS. DOT.

I know. And in recognition of this I want you to accept a little present. Where is my cheque-book?

FREDDIE.

[*Producing it promptly.*] Oh, no, really, I shouldn't like you to do anything of the sort. [*Putting it in front of her, and giving her a pen.*] I feel that I'm amply paid for all that I do for you. I simply can't accept anything more.

MRS. DOT.

I was afraid you would object.

[*She writes, and he watches her carefully.*

FREDDIE.

Five hundred pounds. Oh, you are a ripper! But why on earth do you give me that?

MRS. DOT.

It may be useful to you. Suppose you had an idea of getting married, for instance, it would be very convenient to have a sum like that in your pocket.

FREDDIE.

But I'm not thinking of getting married.

MRS. DOT.

Aren't you? I suppose you know that when you do, I'm proposing to give you two thousand a year.

FREDDIE.

I say, that's awfully good of you.

[*He takes the cheque and gloats over it.* MRS. DOT *quickly takes a special licence out of the drawer and puts it on the table.*

MRS. DOT.

Now I'm going for a turn in the garden.

FREDDIE.

You are a brick.

[*She goes out. As soon as he sees the coast is clear, he gives a peculiar whistle.* NELLIE *comes in.*

NELLIE.

I thought your whistle was never coming. They wanted me to go on the river. I had to invent all sorts of excuses.

FREDDIE.

I don't know how it is, but somehow we never manage to get a minute by ourselves.

NELLIE.

It's perfectly maddening. What a good idea it was of yours to meet in the garden after they'd all gone to bed.

FREDDIE.

Was it my idea? I always thought it was yours!

NELLIE.

[*With wounded dignity.*] It's not likely I should have proposed a thing like that.

FREDDIE.

No, it isn't likely.

NELLIE.

I'm perfectly distracted. If you only knew how that man bores me!

FREDDIE.

I can't think what you ever saw in him.

NELLIE.

I was never really fond of him, you know. I only

accepted him because he was so desperately in love with me, and mamma wouldn't hear of it.

FREDDIE.

When did you first know that you cared for me?

NELLIE.

Oh, I don't know. I think as soon as ever I found out you were in love with me.

FREDDIE.

[*Rather taken aback.*] Oh!

NELLIE.

When did you begin to love me?

FREDDIE.

Well, you know, I was awfully flattered by your caring for me.

NELLIE.

Oh! . . . [*There is a pause.*] I don't think I quite understand.

FREDDIE.

[*Opening his arms.*] Darling!

NELLIE.

[*Cuddling in them.*] Oh, it makes me feel so delightfully wicked. I know I oughtn't to let you kiss me. I know it's treachery to poor Gerald.

FREDDIE.

He isn't worthy of you.

NELLIE.

He simply worships the ground I tread on. I am a perfect beast.

FREDDIE.

We're treating him shamefully.

NELLIE.

I shall never forgive myself.

FREDDIE

Poor Gerald. . . . He is an ass, isn't he?

NELLIE.

Oh, awful [*They both go into shrieks of laughter.*

NELLIE.

Take care!

[MRS. DOT *comes in with flowers in her hands.*

MRS. DOT.

Did I leave my scissors here? Just see if you can find them, Freddie. Perhaps they're in the next room. [*He goes out.*] I wonder if I left them on the writing-table.

[NELLIE *looks, sees the licence, starts, and turns round to hide it.*

NELLIE

[*Agitated*] No, there's nothing here at all.

[FREDDIE *comes in with the scissors.*

FREDDIE.

Here they are!

MRS. DOT.

Thanks so much. [*She goes out.*

NELLIE.

Freddie, how could you be so incautious? It was only by the greatest presence of mind that I was able to hide it.

FREDDIE.

What *do* you mean?

NELLIE.

You ought to have told me. I don't think it was nice of you to get a licence without saying a word to me about it. I think it was a great liberty.

FREDDIE.

A licence?

NELLIE.

You must know that I can't marry you. Nothing will induce me to break my promise to Gerald. I'm very angry with you.

FREDDIE.

I haven't the least idea what you're talking about.

NELLIE.

How can you tell such stories?

[*She hands him the licence. He stares at it, utterly astonished.*

FREDDIE.

Where did you find this?

NELLIE.

It was lying on the writing-table. I suppose you're not going to deny all knowledge of it. [*He stares at it still.*] Freddie, how bold of you! But you really couldn't imagine for a moment that I'd consent to run away with you. Oh, Freddie, I'm so flattered. How you must love me!

FREDDIE.

[*To himself.*] Two thousand a year! [*He takes the cheque from his pocket and looks at it. Suddenly light dawns on him. He puts cheque and licence back into his pocket.*] It's fairly clear that a licence couldn't have got there by itself.

NELLIE.

What on earth made you think of sending for it?

FREDDIE.

[*Brazenly.*] I thought it was the only way to win you.

NELLIE.

Have you had it long?

FREDDIE.

It only arrived this morning. Look here, why shouldn't we bolt? You don't care a straw for Gerald, and you do care for me.

NELLIE.

It would break his heart. I couldn't, I couldn't! Besides, where are we to bolt to? I daren't. Mamma would never forgive me.

FREDDIE.

You see, with this we can be married anywhere. Let's jump into the motor and go down to my father near Oxford. We shall arrive by dinner-time, and he'll marry us to-morrow morning.

NELLIE.

You don't mean to say your father's in the Church?

FREDDIE.

Of course he's in the Church. I was most careful in my choice of a parent.

NELLIE.

Oh, how clever of you to have a father who's a clergyman! You think of everything, Freddie.

FREDDIE.

Look here, there's not a minute to waste. Will you risk it?

NELLIE.

No, no, no! Freddie, how can you ask me such a thing. . . . I'll just go and put on my hat.

FREDDIE.

You brick.

[*She runs out. He walks up and down excitedly. The servants bring in the tea.* NELLIE *comes back with her hat on.*]

FREDDIE.

Hurry up!

NELLIE.

This *is* romance, isn't it?

[*They go to the door that leads into the garden, hand in hand. They are confronted by* LADY SELLENGER *and* GERALD, BLENKINSOP *and* MISS MACGREGOR.

LADY SELLENGER.

Where are you going in such a hurry?

NELLIE.

[*Promptly.*] We were just going to call you all in to tea. [MRS. DOT *comes in.*

MRS. DOT.

I've just had the motor brought round in case any one would like to go out.

[*She goes to the writing-table to see if the licence has been removed. They all sit down and have tea.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Nellie, my love, I've been discussing a very important matter with Gerald.

MRS. DOT.

I know. You asked him to name the day.

LADY SELLENGER.

I feel that I have no right to restrain any longer the very natural impatience of these young things.

NELLIE.

[*Aghast.*] And what did Gerald say?

LADY SELLENGER.

He wishes to leave it entirely to you.

NELLIE.

I'm sure that's very obliging of him.

GERALD.

Not at all.

MRS. DOT.

Of course, he's all eagerness.

GERALD.

[*Grimly.*] Yes.

NELLIE.

I would much sooner—let Gerald fix it at his own convenience.

LADY SELLENGER.

I think it's delightful, the way they give in to one another.

GERALD.

We shall only bore Mrs. Dot if we discuss the matter now.

LADY SELLENGER.

We're all old friends here. I'm sure Mrs. Dot will help us with her advice.

MRS. DOT.

My own opinion is, that in these matters the sooner the better.

BLENKINSOP.

When you have to take a pill the best thing is to swallow it down without thinking.

LADY SELLENGER.

Cynic! What do you say to six weeks from to-day?

NELLIE.

That would suit me beautifully.

GERALD.

Then there's no more to be said.

LADY SELLENGER.

What a beautiful thing love is!

[NELLIE *gets up.*

NELLIE.

[*To* FREDDIE.] Are you coming?

FREDDIE.

Certainly.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Surprised.*] Where are you going, Nellie?

NELLIE.

Mr. Perkins has promised to take me for a little drive in the motor. I feel it's the only thing to send away my headache.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*In an undertone.*] My darling, is this wise? Remember the feelings of this poor young man.

NELLIE.

[*Also in an undertone.*] I thought you'd like an opportunity of talking privately to Gerald.

LADY SELLENGER.

Why, darling?

NELLIE.

Dear mamma, the settlements.

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Smiling affectionately.*] You sweet, practical child! You'll be your own mother again at my age.

NELLIE.

May I go then?

LADY SELLENGER.

Do. But don't be away very long.

NELLIE.

[*Kissing her.*] Good-bye, mamma.

[*She goes out with* FREDDIE. *Almost immediately the sound of a motor-horn is heard, as they drive away.*

LADY SELLENGER.

The dear child, she has such a sweet, trusting nature. You must kiss me, too, Gerald!

GERALD.

I shall be delighted, I'm sure.

[*She puts up her cheek, which he kisses.* A SERVANT *comes in with a note.*

SERVANT.

Miss Sellenger told me to give you this at once, Madam.

MRS. DOT.

Oh. [*She opens it and gives a cry.*] Good heavens! Oh, the deceitful wretch! Lady Sellenger, how shall I tell you? It's from Nellie.

LADY SELLENGER.

From Nellie!

MRS. DOT.

[*Reading.*] "Dear Mrs. Dot, I'm just off to marry Freddie. Break it to Mamma gently."

LADY SELLENGER.

[*Starting up.*] Impossible! Stop them! Stop them! Where are they?

MRS. DOT.

[*Reading.*] "I couldn't marry Gerald. He's too great a"—there's a word in big letters. I never could read capitals. [*She hands the note to* GERALD.

GERALD.

The word is "B. O. R. E."

MRS. DOT.

[*Pretending to be much surprised.*] Bore!

BLENKINSOP.

[*With immense satisfaction.*] Bore!

AUNT ELIZA.

[*Meditatively.*] Bore!

LADY SELLENGER.

Oh, how monstrous! My poor Gerald, what shall I do?

[GERALD *goes into a roar of laughter. He laughs louder and louder.*

LADY SELLENGER.

Gerald! Gerald! Don't! Pull yourself together. The poor boy, he's perfectly hysterical. Where are my salts? Mrs. Dot, for heaven's sake calm him down. Oh, my dear! You mustn't upset yourself yet.

BLENKINSOP.

He looks cut up, doesn't he?

LADY SELLENGER.

We'll pursue them. There's no harm done yet. We'll catch them. I promise you we'll catch them.

You shall marry her, Gerald, if I have to drag her to church by the hair of her head.

[*At this he stops suddenly and stares at her in dismay.*

GERALD.

What are you going to do?

LADY SELLENGER.

We must chase them. Where's your motor, Mr. Blenkinsop? Didn't you tell me it was the fastest machine in England?

BLENKINSOP.

I did say something of the sort.

LADY SELLENGER.

We shall catch them up. Gerald, you must drive me. I can't trust any one else to go fast enough.

MRS. DOT.

But you don't know which way they've gone.

LADY SELLENGER.

Don't be so silly. Of course they've gone to Brighton. When people elope they always go to Brighton.

[MRS. DOT *slips out of the room.*

GERALD.

And what'll you do if we come up to them? You can't force them to come back.

LADY SELLENGER.

If a woman can't force her daughter to marry any man she chooses, I don't know what the English nation is coming to.

GERALD.

I won't marry the girl against her will.

LADY SELLENGER.

Fiddlededee! Of course you'll marry her. Who is this creature she's run away with? Perkins! Perkins with a P. I never heard anything so ridiculous. Do you suppose my daughter is going to be Mrs. Perkins—Perkins with a P?

BLENKINSOP.

You couldn't very well spell it with a W could you?

LADY SELLENGER.

Hold your impudent tongue, sir!

GERALD.

Now, let's have this out and be done with it. I'm no more in love with Nellie than she is with me, I was going to marry her because I'd promised to. and it seemed a low down trick to draw back . . .

LADY SELLENGER.

The man's mad. The shock has turned his brain.

GERALD.

When I heard she'd bolted, I could have jumped for

joy. I seem to have awaked out of a ghastly nightmare. Nothing will induce me to try and catch her up.

LADY SELLENGER.

You monster! How dare you trifle with the affections of my daughter! You don't mean to stand by and see her marry a man called Perkins!

GERALD.

I wouldn't even mind if she married a man called Vere de Vere.

LADY SELLENGER.

Very well, then, the chauffeur shall drive me. You're a heartless brute. Perkins with a P. And penniless to boot.

[*She flounces out of the room and bangs the door.*

GERALD.

Where's Mrs. Dot? [*He goes into the garden.*

BLENKINSOP.

What a charming mother-in-law that woman will make!

[MRS. DOT *comes in with a large kitchen knife in one hand and a poker in the other.*

MRS. DOT.

I've done it!

BLENKINSOP.

Done what?

MRS. DOT.

Lady Sellenger thinks she's going in your motor, but she isn't.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Starting up.*] What have you done to my motor?

MRS. DOT.

As soon as she talked of it, I ran to the kitchen and seized this knife and I seized this poker.

BLENKINSOP.

Woman!

MRS. DOT.

I've ripped up all the tyres, they're simply in ribands, James.

BLENKINSOP.

Good Lord!

MRS. DOT.

I don't know what I've done to the steering gear, but I know it'll never work again. Oh, it's in an awful state.

BLENKINSOP.

But that's a bran-new motor. I've just paid eighteen hundred pounds for it.

MRS. DOT.

And so that there shouldn't be any risk I opened the

place where the works are, and I rummaged around with the poker. I *think* I've smashed everything.

BLENKINSOP.

Oh! Oh! [*He buries his head in his hands.*

MRS. DOT.

The thing's a wreck and a ruin. You should have seen the tyres go flop, flop, flop.

BLENKINSOP.

But I'm going to race next week.

MRS. DOT.

It'll be impossible to move it for a month. It *is* in a state.

BLENKINSOP.

Eighteen hundred pounds!

MRS. DOT.

I don't know how much it'll cost to put right. You don't mind, James, do you?

BLENKINSOP.

Mind!

MRS. DOT.

I shouldn't like you to be cross with me.

BLENKINSOP.

[*Furiously.*] Oh!

MRS. DOT.

You won't let this disturb your affection for me? Remember that you're going to marry me.

BLENKINSOP.

Marry you. I'd rather marry my cook.

[*He flings out of the room.*

MRS. DOT.

[*Looking after him, innocently.*] He *is* in a temper, isn't he? It's very hard to please everybody in this life.

AUNT ELIZA.

You're quite incorrigible.

MRS. DOT.

Would you mind taking these implements away? I'm really very tired.

AUNT ELIZA.

I suppose breaking motors is rather hard work.

MRS. DOT.

And you get very little thanks for it.

[AUNT ELIZA *goes out.* MRS. DOT *sinks into a chair, with a sigh of relief.* GERALD *comes in. She realises that he is behind her, but*

pretends not to notice him. He comes up softly.

GERALD.

Dot!

MRS. DOT.

[*Pretending to start.*] Oh, how you frightened me! You might remember that my nerves are in a very agitated state.

GERALD.

You asked me a question a little while ago. I can answer it now.

MRS. DOT.

I'm so sorry, I've quite forgotten what it was. It can't have been of the smallest importance.

GERALD.

You asked me if I loved you.

MRS. DOT.

How absurd! And do you?

GERALD.

With all my heart, and I've loved you passionately from the first moment I saw you.

MRS. DOT.

With never a day off?

GERALD.

With never a day off. I wanted to tell you every minute, and yet I couldn't be such a cad.

MRS. DOT.

[*Sarcastically.*] It's awfully nice of you to say all this, and I can't tell you how flattered I am.

GERALD.

Dot!

MRS. DOT.

Only it's rather late in the day. I've promised my hand and heart to James Blenkinsop.

GERALD.

Fiddle!

MRS. DOT.

[*Raising her eyebrows.*] I beg your pardon?

GERALD.

[*Firmly.*] Fiddle!

MRS. DOT.

Are you under the delusion that because a happy chance has freed you from a previous engagement, I'm going to seize the opportunity and leap into your arms?

GERALD.

You know, women are brutes. One tries to do the straight thing and behave more or less like a white

man, and they make you feel as if you'd been an utter beast.

MRS. DOT.

Do you know why Nellie jilted you? Because you're a bore.

GERALD.

[*Smiling.*] I daresay I'm very stupid. I suppose that's why I love you so much.

MRS. DOT.

My dear Gerald, you were cured of your passion for Nellie in a month. I have no doubt that a week in Paris will make your heart whole once more.

GERALD.

[*Calmly.*] Are you packing me off by any chance?

MRS. DOT.

Marked—damaged.

GERALD

[*With his tongue in his cheek.*] Then Good-bye!

MRS. DOT.

Bon voyage.

[*He turns to go and walks slowly to the door. She seizes a cushion and throws it at him, then turns her back on him. He stops, picks up the cushion and gravely brings it to her.*

GERALD.

I think you dropped something.

MRS. DOT.

[*Gravely.*] Thank you.

[*He looks at her, with a smile. She begins to laugh. Suddenly he takes her in his arms.*

GERALD.

You silly little fool.

THE END

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